

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT UPON FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS ON RESERVE, IN RELATION TO THEIR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

by

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION
IN
SPECIAL EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

November 2017

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the question “To what degree is educational attainment impacted for First Nations students, when comparing a band-operated elementary school with the public system?”

Community members (n=26), both parents/guardians and students, shared their thoughts and opinions on the elementary experiences of the children. Collecting data from students and parents/guardians was intended to generate comparative scripts about the community perceptions of the band-operated school and the public system. Exploring what attitudes, beliefs, benefits, and drawbacks community members had for elementary systems would help to decipher what the impact was.

Quantitative data was gathered from a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. Qualitative data was collected from individual parental interviews with three parents from each schooling system, and focus group discussions with three students from each schooling system. The data indicated that those distinctions included family, pride and confidence, appropriate learning and academics, local connections and conveniences, inter-racial relations, and finally, traditional and cultural values and skills. Those themes were consistently evident and are recognized as the core impacts for First Nations students, when comparing a band-operated school with the public system.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to extend a gracious and sincere thanks to Dr. Andrew Kitchenham. He provided support and guidance, and boosted my confidence in order for me to see this thesis come to fruition. His knowledge and rapid responses to any dilemma I faced was met head-on with both a simplicity when required, and a depth of philosophical reasoning when appropriate. I truly appreciate all he has done over the years.

As my committee members, I would like to extend thanks to Joan Bartley and Dr. Tina Fraser. They were both instrumental in the various stages of this thesis. I would also like to thank my external evaluator, Dr. Simon Blakesley. He had insightful and relevant advice to further develop ideas around Aboriginal Education.

I cannot express enough gratitude to my partner Amy Brockmeyer, and my daughter Galadrielle Burgess. They were patient in allowing me time when needed and giving me the opportunity to work on this thesis.

Finally, and most of all, I would like to thank the community where I work and where I completed this research. I have gained so much from the community members whom I have had the privilege to meet and know. I owe all I have learned to each and every person who has been part of this experience.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Education for First Nations children has historically been a troublesome component of colonial adjustment. In the current educational system, there are disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal children graduating high school in comparison to non-Aboriginal students (Kanu, 2007; Levin, 2009; Richards, Vining & Weimer, 2010). Educating children on-reserve is an ongoing process that has transgressed from culturally decimating during the residential school era to sub-par in present times. Results do show some improvement, as the percentage of First Nations people with high school diplomas is presently higher than ever; however, graduation rates have been rising for all children and when investigating First Nations children, it is apparent that drop-out rates and lower academic achievement remain a serious concern.

To ensure that Aboriginal children demonstrate proficiency that is comparable to their Non-Native peers, an investigation surrounding the learning atmospheres for Aboriginal children would be conducive to creating the optimal setting for success. The dichotomy between children raised on-reserve when relationally compared to children who are raised off-reserve shows very different outcomes. The high school completion rates outlined by Richards, Vining, and Weimer (2010) showed a 64 % graduation rate for those Aboriginal students in urban centres with a population over 100,000 and a slight drop to 60% in cities under 100,000 persons. For those First Nations children who attended school in rural regions, the completion rate was similar at 59 percent. However, an astonishing drop is recognized for on-reserve children at a mere 39 percent. This statistic is a recognisable factor regarding the less-than-acceptable conditions occurring for First Nations students on-reserve.

There has been a sincere desire for a more effective and engaging educational design for First Nations learners. The idea of Aboriginal control over Aboriginal Education has been more

than a rallying call, and indeed, there is more Aboriginal input, staffing, content and principles of learning than at any time in colonial history.

The Aboriginal student population of Canada is represented in both the provincial public-school systems, as well as on-reserve schools which operate under the umbrella of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC, formerly Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, INAC). It is clear that consideration should be taken to investigate the effectiveness of each system in transforming Aboriginal students into successful graduates.

In this chapter, there will be a description of the rationale for investigating the impacts of the two separate education systems upon First Nation, on-reserve children. This initial chapter will also go on to explain the research questions, observe some of the limitations of the research, and finally, to clarify important terminology that will be used in the paper.

Significance of the Study

I decided to look at the public-school system, and band-operated school system in a compare and contrast scenario. These elementary educational settings have been central to an ongoing debate in the community I have been teaching in for the last nine years. All too often, I had students telling me that they would be leaving the community school, whether mid-year or end of the year, to attend one of the district schools. There was ample amount of the reverse happening too, in that, I would have children who had made the choice to leave the public school for the band-operated school joining my class at various points in the school year.

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the reasons for families choosing one school, and school system, over another. As well, I thought this type of research would also help to

guide and inform educators and community members on the issues that are seen as integral for creating positive and successful learning situations for the children.

Background to the Study

Children in this Northern B.C. village generally attend the community school, which is operated under an arm of the band administration. The school is a K-7 school that provides services for approximately 60 students and has been in continuous operation since the early 1980's. There are a number of families that opt out of the community school though, and choose to have their children attend one of the public schools in the closest town. The school district does provide bus services to and from the town.

The school district had three elementary schools up until this year. One of the elementary schools was permanently closed in June 2016, leaving only two elementary schools. Both of these schools do have a handful of children who make the commute from the community. The schools themselves are fairly typical in structure to any other public elementary school, with the only obvious exception being, one of the elementary schools has a French immersion stream. There is not generally any interest in the French immersion stream for children from the community.

Students have historically had to leave the community for high school, which is in the same town as the school district elementary schools. However, there is an alternative high school program in its fourth year in the community. The community alternative program is designed to provide an adapted learning structure for children from both the community and the town, who may have been unsuccessful at the district secondary school. This program is funded and provided through the band-operated system and the local education society. The alternative

high school program has demonstrated an ability to increase the student enrollment from the initial year in September 2013 of 24, to 30 the following year, to 50 in September 2015, and has seen its first decrease to about 30 again for September 2016. There is a bus provided by the alternative program that transports children from the town to the community. According to the Education Director, of the student population at the alternative program, the majority had attended the public system for elementary school, while only about 20% are graduates from the band-operated school. It was also suggested that although some of the alternative program students do have learning challenges, many were recognized as average or better in elementary school and their schooling began to unravel in high school (personal communication, D. Mattson, June 9 2015).

The alternative program includes formal and informal lessons of life skills and culturally relevant learning opportunities, aside from the development of academic abilities. The incorporation of music, technology, elder input, field outings, and team building activities are all identified as benefits for children at the alternative program. Although this program is recognized as a positive addition to the community for children who are unable to succeed at the district high school, there is still a consensus that students should strive for success in the district high school. Ultimately, the elementary schools in the town and the community are tasked with molding students who have the capabilities to be successful in the mainstream high school and to earn their Dogwood diploma from the same institute as other learners throughout the region.

Research Problem

Children from the community, whether they have attended the community band-operated school or one of the public schools in the town, have approximately the same graduation rates as the provincial average. The *Interior News* presented an article about local achievement rates and

it was stated that the Aboriginal graduation rate in 2013-14 was 53 percent, which was an increase from 46 percent in 2009-10. These rates of educational achievement for First Nations students lag far behind the non-Aboriginal graduation rate of 83 percent in 2013-14, which was up from 81 percent in 2009-10. Of the Aboriginal student population who attend the district high school, not all of these students live on-reserve, and not all of them are from the community.

Finding ways to engage learners at the high school level is key to improving these rates of graduation, however, much of the academic and social skills required for this success are first being fostering at the elementary level. There is research to support the notion that the learning gap increasing through the years and that early intervention can help to build more capable learners (Pressley & McCormick, 2007; Winzer, 2008). This is not only true in the academic sense but on a behavioral and social level as well. This sentiment is further supported by the research completed by Bell et al. (2004), that investigated the successes in Aboriginal schooling. The elementary school must strive to develop students that are prepared to succeed in their academic studies and in their ability to adapt to the social setting and structure that is expected at high school.

When attempting to get an interpretation of the elementary school experiences and impact upon students and their families from the community, qualitative data that could be collected would seem to have the most value in this research. Mackay and Myles (1999) suggested that statistics simply don't allow for a whole story to be told. All elementary aged students in British Columbia complete the Foundational Skills Assessments in grades four and seven. The Fraser Institute does use this data in a way that ranks schools in a hierarchy of successfulness, which is subjective to say the least. This sort of data would not be beneficial in the goal of my research, nor is simply knowing that Aboriginal graduation rates are lower than non-Aboriginal graduation

rates. The rationale that there is far more to gain from exploring why things are as they are in Aboriginal Education, and how this can be altered to improve situations for First Nations learners is described by Mackay and Myles (1999), who claimed that a snapshot or generalization from a solely quantitative method would miss many of the important outcome possibilities. Therefore, I felt that getting specific input from parents and students of both schooling systems about what has been effective in their elementary school experiences would best explain this analysis. As well, personal inquiry and reflective thoughts from community members could guide a better implementation of an educational philosophy that would further support positive development for the children of the community, regardless of which school they attend.

Rationale

The rationale for examining the impact on First Nations children with regards to their elementary school experience is a key component to developing the resources and programming to ensure that the transition into high school is successful. Success and a sense of accomplishment in elementary school should equate to the same feelings of success and sense of accomplishment in high school, which should ultimately improve graduation rates among the Aboriginal population.

In reviewing the goals of a successful elementary school for First Nations learners, there is the clear sense that educational attainment is best fostered and sequestered from the elementary years (Bell, 2004; Hyslop, 2011). The evidence points to having the tools and resources in place at an early age is most beneficial for learners to develop their skills for success through their entire educational career. In order to transfer the skills required for high school, an elementary school must be effectively preparing students for this journey.

Research Question and Supporting Questions

Ultimately, the question I wanted to have answered from this research was: why do families choose one elementary school over another?. So, throughout this thesis I was focussed on the research question: *To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the community in a public elementary school?*. To further support this question, I also continually examined the following questions: What might be the effects of elementary school experiences that influence the high school successes of children from the community?; Is one school system impacting the students more positively than the other?; How is it more positively impacting the children, or what might be taking place at this facility that is making it more effective in student achievement?.

Limitations

There are two key limitations recognized in this study. The first is a concern for geographical and cultural relevancy. Research by Cardinal (1999), Davis, Anderson and Jamal (2001), and Labercane and McEachern (1995), remind us that each and every Aboriginal community has diverse and unique qualities. The number of First Nations languages, and dialects within those languages, are vast. These extensive, spread-out, often isolated or segregated groups, observe individually relevant cultural and specific traditional practices that procure difficulty in generalizing research outcomes. Therefore, research from one First Nation community of students may not apply to all First Nations children.

Secondly, mobility plays a role in all too many of the children's learning settings. The research by Aman (2008) supports this by stating that educational achievement is directly

influenced by the number of schools a student has attended. This evidence alone dissuaded me from including many potential participants. There are a great number of students in the community that either start in one of the school systems and move to the other at some point in their elementary years. There are even instances of children who have transferred back and forth on a plurality of occasions. I was inclined to only include participants who had spent all, or a great proportion of their elementary schooling at a singular setting.

Delimitations

This research studied a cohort of First Nation youth that were aged within a five-year span. The youngest of the participants were born in 2000, or were commencing their grade 11 year in 2016. The oldest were born in 1995 and were in the local workforce, or attending post-secondary education. I chose this age-related cohort to keep my study as present and cohesive as possible. However, this de-limits the study, as a longitudinal study may have provided better data to track and as well as having a higher number of participants. Creswell (2012) makes reference to a longitudinal study having the benefit to study participants over time, while a more cross-sectional format is a more specific and condensed time for a study to take place. This being a Masters thesis, a longitudinal study may have been able to provide data that may be greater and clearer with a depth of detail, however the time-consuming element proved that it was just not feasible.

Summary

This research was founded on the fact that educational achievement for First Nations children is not on par with the achievement levels of non-Native children. Aboriginal control over Aboriginal education is one factor that has been recognized as a positive development for

Aboriginal children. However, with First Nations children being educated in two different streams, both the federally funded, band-operated system and the provincially funded public-school system, there is a need to bring higher levels of success to both venues.

This study examined two elementary school systems that are educating the children of a particular community. Children are provided the choice to depart the community to the public school in town, or to remain in the community to attend the band-operated school. A comparison surrounding the effective practices and successes, as well as the areas that could be improved was the goal of this research, and should be viewed as instrumental in recognizing how the next generation of this community conceptualizes the elementary educational experiences.

The community as a whole has a vested interest in seeing the best educational outcomes for the children as possible. There are children who attend elementary school in town, others who attend the elementary school in the community, and there are others who move in and out of both. The majority of the student aged population attend the community school, yet there is a strong appeal for some families to have their children commute to one of the two the public schools in town.

Whether the elementary school setting is public or band-operated, children usually attend the public high school in town. The recently created alternative high school program that is operating in the community has been successful in recruiting students who have not been able to complete their studies at the public high school. Ultimately though, the public high school is the direction that is preferred for the majority of families.

The rates of graduation in the community are fairly typical of Aboriginal rates nationally. Statistically speaking, the community is relatively typical of most First Nations reserves.

Gathering more than statistical data is the core of this research though. Gathering both quantitative and qualitative data would guide this investigation of elementary experiences.

There are limitations surrounding this thesis, which included the uniqueness of each and every First Nation's location, and the negative repercussions that result from student mobility. A delimitation centralizes upon the fact that a longitudinal study would be more rounded in gaining insight into this community issue, however, this is just not a reasonable expectation for a Master's thesis.

There is no denying that there are social factors, negative historical implications, and educational inequality specific to First Nations' reserves and villages that hinder better academic results. Investigating the impact upon First Nations students in relation to their elementary school experience was the intended point of this thesis. In doing so, the resulting research should be of informative support for all community members and educators, both local and beyond the local.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 1 demonstrated the relevance of conducting this research, provided rationale for the focus questions and research question that were being covered, and regarded other minor aspects of the community and Aboriginal Education. The literature review will now commence with a brief recognition of what education has been for First Nations people prior to contact with European settlers, the more recent history of the Eurocentric infusion of education, and what education is presently. From this point, the review will move into looking at studies that demonstrate what some of the present Aboriginal issues are, including social circumstances and the increased awareness of First Nations' cultures. Next, the review will shift towards studies that support the sense of community. This will be supported by both standards and issues that are specific to the on-Reserve experience and the successful development of a community, reserve, or village. Finally, the review will conclude with a discussion on some of the developments and improvements of Aboriginal Education and the roles that specific entities and individuals should be providing. A look at research that expressed the concerns and explanations for present day Aboriginal Education will be supported by reviewing who the vested parties are in guiding Aboriginal Education into the future to include community members and educators at all levels.

Aboriginal Education

Education is not an idea that has been absent in Aboriginal culture. First Nations children were historically educated as their community saw fit. Elders and adults had been providing educational experiences such as skills in gathering medicines, hunting, trapping, cooking, building and constructing, and an oral tradition of literacy that included myths, legends and story telling. All of these aspects of learning took place before any contact with European settlers.

Aboriginal youth were taught what was necessary in specific circumstances that would build success for themselves and the group or community as a whole. Valaskakis (2000) recognized that there are few, if any, parallelisms in the practices of the past to present day of how to transfer knowledge and information from one generation to the next. Although the world is a much-changed place presently, when compared to times past, education is at the centre of all social progress. Thus, there is a necessary recognition of Aboriginal Education from all places in history. Leavitt (1995) recognized a different form of education that was happening throughout the lives of Aboriginal people. Unique ways of gaining knowledge, communicating, discussing and problem solving were evident in the relations between elders, adults, youth, children, toddlers and infants. Education in pre-contact times was organized in a very different way than it has been since the time of colonialism, focussing on only the past or only the present will not best develop First Nations youth. There is the need to move forward with the changes in the world, while at the same time not ignoring the contributions Aboriginal thought has provided in the past to support the youth.

Pre-Contact. Learning has always been a key aspect of Aboriginal lifestyle and experience. Curwin Doige (2001) related the importance of recognizing literacy with an Aboriginal lens. The content of her research described what literacy was and specifically what Aboriginal literacy looked like in terms of a historical context, and present-day learning environments. Presently, literacy is viewed as the ability to read and write. This Euro-centric take on literacy fails to recognize the significance of traditional methods of communicating. Curwen Doige (2001) expressed that, educators must be aware of the exceptional literacy perspective that Aboriginal learners bring to the class. The skills that have been traditionally in Aboriginal cultures are required to be accepted and practiced. The researcher stated that knowing

of Aboriginal literacy is an integral step in developing the present-day interpretation of literacy. Aboriginal students should receive the recognition of being literate in a culturally relevant capacity. The study reviewed the history of how Aboriginal literacy was ignored by the first Europeans, and then repressed altogether. Before contact with Europeans, it was well established that Aboriginal people were extremely literate in the oral tradition and story telling, as well as symbolic representation through the arts. It is only since the Euro-centric dominance of educational thought and structure was forced upon the First people of Canada that there have been such widespread problems and discrepancies.

Euro-centric influence. Since the time of contact with the populations who arrived from Europe, the degree to which education has unravelled is astounding. The history of Aboriginal Education, in the context of the changed society that Aboriginal people had been burdened with, was nothing less that atrocious. A culture that was intended to be stamped out, destroyed, and forgotten has seen historical wrongs of monumental proportions. The impact of residential schooling is central to the loss of language, the loss of culture, and the overall negativistic view of education from many First Nations communities.

Although his Master's thesis was based on educational achievement for On-Reserve, First Nation children in the late 1990s, Mason (1998) included an introductory description that demonstrated just how detrimental the residential experience had been. In defining a short summary of education in colonial times, Mason (1998) noted that the two controlling entities included the government and the church. Both of these bodies of influence intruded upon First Nations rights through imposition and domination of ideology and being, as well as inflicting countless forms of abuse. In fact, it was further expressed by Mason (1998) that domination had become such a power position by government that legislation was passed to ensure all Aboriginal

children were not to be raised by parents and families, but to spend all the childhood years in Residential Schools that were operated by various factions of religion. There is further research that the Residential School experience has been a severely negative influence upon First Nations cultures, traditions, languages, people and communities.

In a case study that examined 10 First Nations schools across the country, there were a plethora of social difficulties in both community and the educational realm that were the direct result of Residential Schools (Bell et al., 2004). To this day Residential Schools are at the centre of discussion when it comes to Aboriginal Education. There is an educational negativity that persists to this day, and Bell et al (2004) found through conducting interviews and discussion groups that much of the blame of alcoholism, ineffective parenting and role models, and an absence of educational successes was because of the traumatic legacy of Residential Schools. The feelings and emotions that impacted Residential School survivors, and the generations that have followed, was brought up many times in my own research and is further discussed in Chapter four. The damage has continued to impact every generation to this day.

Present times. As Aboriginal Education moved into the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, struggles to find methods for improving the results of Aboriginal students have persisted. Today, Native children are in a better place, in an educational sense, than their ancestors. However, incredible discrepancies continue to emphasize the fact that Aboriginal Education is a topic that requires much more work and a developmental directive that brings First Nations students onto an equal footing as their non-Native peers.

One such study that re-affirms the need to review the Aboriginal Education conundrum was conducted by Mattson and Caffrey (2001). In the last thirty to fifty years, Aboriginal Education has moved more and more into the hands of Aboriginal people. These writers

described that by the early 1970's federal governments had done enough damage to the health and well-being of Aboriginal people in the field of education and that the time was ripe for putting the control of education into the hands of First Nations themselves. The issue of jurisdiction and control has evolving ever since.

A key point in their report (Mattson & Caffrey, 2001) was that there continues to be discussion about the concerns of educational inequality. The research provided evidence that clearly demonstrated less than desirable results for Aboriginal students. This article proceeded in presenting issues that were preventing a higher representation of successful Aboriginal students. Throughout their report, Mattson and Caffrey (2001) recognized barriers and factors that have continued to plague First Nations communities, both in a general sense and in an educational sense. Some of these elements that were investigated included, the hierarchical control of education; who possesses the knowledge to effectively guide and develop Aboriginal learners, as well as the roles of Aboriginal youth, parents and families; curriculum that is Euro-centric; the higher than average incidences of Aboriginal students being placed in Special Education; and finally, Socio-economic status factors.

This article was arranged as a review of the literature which supported the proposition that there exists in education a degree of racism or bias and the report was actually written for the British Columbia Human Rights Commission. In seeking better educational outcomes for the Aboriginal population, Mattson and Caffrey (2001) used what they stated as a human rights/Aboriginal rights structure, and provided an explanation of federal and provincial responsibilities. There was further examination and discussion of various Acts, Conventions, Declarations, Treaties, and reports, all of which re-iterate the legal parameters, and essentially, jurisdiction of Aboriginal education. All of these components were analyzed and studied, with a

conclusion that provided recommendations for how best to increase not only Aboriginal graduation rates, but the integrity of the education system as a whole.

This report brought forth the analogy that there are human rights issues that affect Aboriginal communities. The consequences of Aboriginal under-representation within education administration was noted as worth examining because a more locally based support network could better support Aboriginal students. In gaining an understanding of the legal circumstances of Aboriginal education, the band school and public school comparison could be developed with a jurisdictional awareness.

There are contributing factors that depict how the direction of Aboriginal Education has morphed into a more encompassing situation, in that First Nation children and non-Native children are experiencing more of a commonality in their schooling. However, the mainstream immersion of First Nations children has not had results that could be interpreted as on par, or in any sense of achieving equality.

Aboriginal Issues

The general living situations for Aboriginal people is worth noting because, as a whole, there are very different experiences and understandings for Native and non-Native people in Canadian society. History has depicted an unfair stereotype of First Nations. The dichotomy of being a unique culture and race as well as being recognized as the first inhabitants of this country prove somewhat disadvantageous when looking at the general conditions Aboriginal people have implored since European settlement.

Social circumstances. Across the country, the living conditions of Canada's First People are disproportionately unfair. There are aspects of life and survival that are cause for concern among Aboriginal communities, and individuals. Maslow's hierarchy of needs clearly pointed

out the basic requirements of being able to achieve, at least a part of the elements of, biological survival and a sense of safety and security before being able to develop into the next stages. The hierarchy leads to more complex needs such as cognitive and intellectual realizations (Atkinson, Atkinson & Hilgard, 1981). If any of these lower needs are not being met, the next in the hierarchy will be impossible to realize. Therefore, when observing what many Aboriginal people face in their lives, it is no small wonder that educational attainment takes a back seat.

News reports from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation remind us of the statistically skewed rates of Aboriginal people in prison, children in foster care, inadequate drinking water, and levels of poverty. Poverty is not isolated to Aboriginal people on reserve as another CBC article discussed the recognition of there being too many First Nations people living on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Poverty was a recognizable notion in my research also. One parent interviewee stated that he felt many of the children would not be eating were it not for the school breakfast and hot lunch program. These unacceptable statistics are not just newsworthy articles, the research supports the notion that First Nations people and communities are disadvantaged in innumerable ways (Brant James & Renville, 2012; Philips, 2010; Spence, White & Maxim, 2007; Weatherspoon & Schissel, 1998).

Add the atrocities that residential schools have spurned to these aforementioned social concerns, and the development of a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women inquiry, and there can be little wonder that Aboriginal graduation rates also pale in comparison to the mainstream of society.

Renaissance of culture. Levin (2009) described some of the societal improvements for Aboriginal people, including the recognition that more Aboriginal people than ever were becoming doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, and entrepreneurs. This was brought up by

a student when I was conducting the focus group sessions too. He suggested that as role models he sees Aboriginal people in sports, being recognized as musicians, writers and other artists, and in politics.

There are better opportunities for post-secondary education, with Aboriginal students receiving more appropriate services and course work (Levin, 2009). These avenues of higher education provide a spotlight on some prospects that are suitable and adequate for promoting attainment of content that might otherwise be restricted. In light of these signs for achievement in a social, political, artistic, athletic and in some education categories, the highlighted degree of lower graduation rates still dominating the records and statistical framework that is the field of education.

Steps are being taken at the federal government level to recognize some of the past ills towards Aboriginal people in the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In British Columbia, there has been an adjustment to curriculum that better recognizes Aboriginal ways of being, as well as the contributions First Nations have made to Canadian society. Finally, at the community level, there are progressive steps being taken to revitalize languages that are on the brink of extinction (The State of Aboriginal Education, 2009). Positive cultural procurement and role models in positions of power and status is central to the effective distribution of content and knowledge in First Nations communities. This community focus is bringing confidence and pride to people who have endured racism, segregation and domination.

Community

A strong sense of community has the potential to build more confident individuals, and to also create positive and powerful changes to the group as a whole. The Concise Oxford English

Dictionary describes the meaning of community as “a group of people living together in one place, especially one practising common ownership”, as well as “the condition of having certain attitudes and interests in common” (Oxford University Press, 2002).

On-reserve standards/issues. There are more than strictly educational differences in the lives of children being raised on-reserve. Some of the social issues surrounding reserve life create unsecure situations and, occasionally, traumatic and distressing environments. The evidence belaying some of the negative social parameters that affect the children are worrisome. In one northwestern Northern Ontario reserve, a quarter of the students were assessed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (Philips, 2010). Many other chronic social conditions have prevalence on reserves including higher rates of unemployment, substance abuse, domestic disputes and dwelling with only one parent (MacIver, 2012; Spence, White, & Maxime, 2007; Wotherspoon, 2006). Adequate housing, health and nutrition, access to clean drinking water and suicide are some of the facets of reserve life that inhibit children from being successful at school.

Aside from a school, a nursing station, a grocery store or gas bar, and a band office, there is often a lack of employment, entrepreneurial or with industry, for community members who live on-reserve. To seek employment, many Aboriginal people are forced to relocate. The opportunities that are offered off-reserve certainly attract Aboriginal people away from their home community. In a 2006 census statistic, for the Kitimat-Stikine Regional District, there was a rate of 30% unemployment for the Aboriginal population. (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/>). This exorbitant rate reflected the reason for poverty on reserve, as well as high rates of mobility among First Nations people.

In noting the initial challenges for Aboriginal students, MacIver (2012) introduced some of the circumstances that affect children before they even step foot into a school. She made the

distinct correlation between education and employment in that education drop-out rates are directly related to poverty rates and must be corrected so that more children are becoming high school graduates. Poverty, low attainment of education, and low employment or income, is inter-related. If there was a development of more success in the educational field, it would likely translate into more employable citizens.

Further demonstrating that life on-reserve is burdened with a higher degree of hardship than mainstream society is the issue of housing, both quality of infrastructure and who is living in the home. The housing crisis in many First Nation communities is highlighted by severe conditions of mould, overcrowding of households, and inadequate construction of new facilities.

The ramifications of this were measured by Spence, White, and Maxim (2007) when they stated the composure of the household does in fact have an effect upon ability to graduate. The fact that so many children have less than satisfactory living conditions playing against them is an indication of the struggle to achieve well in school. School is predisposed to support and guide children, however, in the case of on-reserve children, real-life conditions can consume them and school will become a substandard reality.

Another component for children living on-reserve is the loss of first languages, loss of culture, and generational impact and residual effects of residential schools. These are all topics that dominate First Nation communities and there is certainly a movement to come to terms with the negative provocations. In describing the still lingering effects of the residential school experience, Goddard and Foster (2002), simply stated that “psychological walls remained” (p. 8). In my own research, the topic of residential schools came up in many of the interviews and the community school students focus group discussion. The element of destruction for Aboriginal people that has plagued them for generations is attempting to be healed by various agencies in

this day and age, but the simple fact remains; much has been lost or destroyed. The opportunity to regain language and culture are at best challenging, at worst, too far gone.

Socio-economic status has been linked to educational success, or lack thereof, and the role poverty plays among First Nation communities is evident. Conditions from clean, healthy lifestyles to employment and education, support the notion that severe challenges exist for children who grow up on-reserve. Statistics demonstrate this fact, lived experience demonstrates this fact, and research articles demonstrate this fact. The attainment of success, both socially and economically, are interwoven with educational achievement. However, educational achievement may be secondary to simple survival.

Successful development of community. Aboriginal populations have been undertaking the concept of community for thousands, if not tens of thousands of years. Blundo (2010) related the sense of community to stories and perspectives that aim to support, guide and improve the well being of those involved. He purported extensively on a Native American community and an African American community that dwelled in oppression for generations, and the integrity it takes to bring those experiences into a capacity of social justice. His claim was that justice will prevail for the cultures of oppression and the changing of institutional mindset starts in the community and builds from there. In order to best recognize where and how a community should progress, a community must look for ways to understand the past and bring the progress to the present. The development of a positive outlook upon the future of their community is a step in gaining the control of the community's best interests, and in the best interests of any community, education must be central to any advancement.

The integral connection between positive community development and education is

re-iterated by Agbo (2012) in his study *Conformity and Rationality in Indigenous Schools*. He presented an argument that painted the federal government's responsibility for educating Aboriginal people as negatively influential in regards to building a chasm between First Nations and Europeans. Agbo (2012) visited a number of isolated reserves in Northern Ontario, in order to gain better understanding of the role of the community in educating its own population. At the centre of his participatory research, and the resulting successes of a community, should be developments incorporated by community members, and community enterprises. His findings did suggest that the Euro-centric influence in these schools continued to exhibit a commanding conformity to mainstream education. Whereas, each community expressly required a more directive and distinctive structure of education. It was found that positive educational attainment was best represented under advancement of a dual-cultural format. Staying true and mindful of the traditional culture, as well as advancing the skills to be competent in the mainstream culture was viewed as the most ideal circumstances for these communities. By giving the community the control to decide and facilitate learning in the manner that the community best saw fit was deemed to be moving Aboriginal Education in the most positive direction,

Each and every community has uniqueness of not only race and ethnicity but culture, economy, and political structure. While a First Nation community has a very different composition and complexity than a fishing community, comparisons can abound. In a study that produced the book *Learning to Leave* (Corbett, 2007), a conceptualization of community is presented as like mindedness of habit working together in a common direction, in order to achieve a common goal. Although the fishing villages in this study had only three generations of which to refer to, compared with countless of generations of connectedness to place and

community for First Nation people, similarities in the form that educational attainment shapes community were evident.

Recognizing the route to being successful can be interpreted in different ways. Corbett (2007) noted that a sense of accomplishment can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, he described one group as those people who stay in communities to develop and create lifestyles that are conducive to what the community stands for and offers. This group thrived on the connections of family, friends and a way of life that they were accustomed to. Secondly, there was a group that was more apt to view success as being able to move out of the community and build a life that was new, different and provided a separate opportunity to learn. The relationship to the community cannot be entirely severed though. A link between community and individuals will always be there because of the common history among the generations of families. This is no better evidenced than on-reserves, where families have had these historical connections for thousands of years.

The purpose of education is generally for learning the skills required to be a competently functioning social actor. Corbett (2007) pointed out that education is an avenue to lead people into a job, or a career. That being said, many of his participants that he interviewed, in previous generations, found that the relevancy of education lacked any importance because even less-educated people were fortunate enough to gain well paid employment in the fishing industry. Securing employment has not come so easy in the most recent generation of the fishing villages, and this has certainly also been the case for Aboriginal people who live on-reserve. A lack of employment in many First Nations communities means that better education is needed if one is to seek opportunity, wherever it may be. This leads to the stability or non-moving, and mobility or willingness to move, conundrum. While there may be better chances of attaining employment

off-reserve, there is still a demand for local, community minded development to support the next generations.

The support and convenience of having family and friends cannot be under-estimated, and this aspect of existence came up time and time again in my research. Whether a student attended the community school or commuted to the public school in the town, family and friends were key to much of the progress people experienced. These connections are further explained in the findings of my research.

Community is a microcosm in a household, or extended family situation. Community is also a macrocosm in a village or reserve. The sense of community is what the people of a place interpret as their way of life and meaningfulness of existence. The development of a successful and adept community is built from the educational capacities and abilities of all stakeholders, and how the future generations are being mentored into upstanding citizens.

Development/Improvement of Aboriginal Education

There is, undoubtedly, reason to view Aboriginal Education with suspicion and scrutiny. The concerns are many and there is plenty to improve upon. Yet, these are happening. There are changes to education that are in support of building a better experience for Aboriginal youth. As well, educational attainment is proving better than at any course of history. Positive advancement is happening, and must continue to evolve in order for Aboriginal Education to be in an entirely positive sphere.

Concerns/Explanations. The need to improve aboriginal education results cannot be denied, and some of the reasons for the present inadequacies are worthy of investigating. With more and more Aboriginal children being raised off reserve, it goes to say that relating their

education rates to those children raised on-reserve is worth investigating. Research by Richards and Vining (2004) recognized that, in terms of statistical numbers, there were two-thirds of the Aboriginal population that are in the provincial education system and do not live on reserve. Although these children do have somewhat better outcomes than many students on-reserve, the academic achievement could be vastly improved. It was noted that British Columbia is the leader of all the provinces for having the lowest drop-out rates in the country. The article initially makes the connection to education attainment and employment income, noting that B.C. again is the only province to adequately track Aboriginal education rates. As far as income of Aboriginal people is concerned, the lowest earning occurs on-reserve in the three Prairie Provinces.

After this investigation by Richards and Vining (2004), there was data collected through test scores at both the primary and secondary level and the connection was stated acknowledging that lower test scores inevitably leads to eventual student drop out, which in turn is going to impact earning and wage capacity. Potential causes for a variance in educational attainment rates among Aboriginal children who live off-reserve still includes poverty, or SES of the neighbourhood and quality of school. The conclusion of the research looked at ways to change the educational structure for children who live off-reserve. The author's recommendations included allowing a more lenient boundary area, so that Aboriginal parents could choose the school in which their children attend. Another suggestion was to develop Aboriginal focus schools, or magnet schools, that provide enhanced culture and Aboriginal content for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

There are examples of these schools, with Prince George now providing an elementary school, and Edmonton developing the Amiskwaciy Academy at the high school level. Richards

and Vining (2004) provided much evidence for what was happening with Native children on and off-reserve in B.C. With there being concerns for levels of achievement for children in both settings, the ability to compare and contrast these results helped to forecast ideology and methodology that could enhance outcomes for all Aboriginal learners.

Transiency is a theme that affects the aboriginal population and is also part of the cause for low educational achievement. The argument suggested by Aman (2008) does support this notion. Aman (2008) used a longitudinal study that reviewed data provided through census records of Aboriginal children who had been enrolled in the public-school system. The years that were investigated were 1991-1992 and 1998-1999 and included children at the secondary level. This information was accessed from the Form 1701 from the B.C. Ministry of Education.

The intention of the research was to monitor any potential impact upon graduation rates when children had numerous locales for their education. The findings did indicate that, indeed, the more movement a child endured, the greater the likelihood that it would negatively affect their ability to succeed in graduating. There was evidence that a large proportion of Aboriginal students do attend a multitude of schools and the two main components of movement included whether the school change was within district or between districts. In reporting the findings, this research found that more than 36.6% of Aboriginal students had changed schools once and that their completion rates were 48.9%, while 31.8% of the children who had remained in the same school had graduation rates of 56.4%. A significant drop occurred with those students who had experienced a change of two schools. This group consisted of 19.8% of the cohort and had a 28% graduation rate. The findings also included children who had three and four changes of school and there was a direct correlation in decreasing graduation rates. This study was

representative of the B.C. Aboriginal student population who attend public high school and the detrimental effects of transition between school mobility and graduation rates.

There is a transient quality among the aboriginal population thus affecting the education of children and in my own research I was somewhat constricted in whom I could use as participants due to the number of children in the community who have come and gone throughout their schooling years. In fact, some children leave and return on more than one occasion within the same year. From the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in foster care to children who are shared between parents, it could be noted that increased mobility even at the elementary level would have significant impacts on success rates, test scores and general student satisfaction with their educational progress.

The idea that children on-reserve attain the least success helps to support the cause of this research. Richards, Vining, and Weimer (2010) suggested that Hispanic and African-American students showed lower academic achievement than their Caucasian peers and that this topic has been investigated in many capacities. Further research not only supports Aboriginal Education for all Aboriginal students, it helps to support successful development of children on-reserve.

The fact that Aboriginal students lag behind other diverse groups is clear and that the Aboriginal children who struggle the most with educational success, come from reserves. With on-reserve children exhibiting these detrimental outcomes, how they are being educated would seem like the first course of investigation.

The reasons for diminished results among the Aboriginal population, in terms of educational accomplishment, are many. This is especially true when reviewing the public system versus band school conundrum. Harper (2000) outlined the specific problem of staffing

at band-operated schools. She discussed the high turnover rate of teachers at AANDC schools and the effects of this on-reserve situation. Teachers can be viewed as guests, and are most certainly known to be temporary. This datum perpetuated the belief that schools were less than stable learning atmospheres. Harper (2000) presented an issue that is a commonality among reserve settings.

In her qualitative study of 10 female teachers, Harper (2000) found that the band-operated schools indeed have less stability than that of the public system. In an interview with a teacher, it was described just how many teachers come and go in the Northern communities. As a result of discontinuity and disruption, children can be distrustful of teaching staff. Teachers are perceived as visitors in many of these communities because there is simply too much evidence that they will not remain.

Aside from the concern of staff revolving through schools for short term periods, funding that comes from the federal level is at a lower rate per student when compared to the public-school system. Levin (2009) expressed that even though expenses and demands on reserve are higher than off reserve, funding is much lower. The ramifications of being funded at lower per student amounts, translates into less adequate or outdated supplies and resources, a slower advancement of technological support and devices, lower quality of maintenance and school grounds upkeep, as well as less opportunity for teacher Professional Development. The overall funding issue was summarized by Philips (2010) when he described what is missing from First Nations schools. “Additional support is required in the following areas: specialists; staffing; on-going support and follow-up; psychological; emotional; cultural services; and early intervention/prevention” (Phillips, 2010, p. 4). These factors all contribute to an educational situation that does not provide favourable conditions for the students.

Another connection between funding and staffing is the amount of specialist teachers in band-operated schools. As noted by Philips (2010), a lack of funding is the key component to what is lacking for on-reserve schools. Specially trained educators are apt to remain in the public-school domain simply because that is where the job security is. Although teaching in isolated communities can result in better wages with Northern Allowance and tax breaks, teacher salaries often do not compare to district pay scales.

An additional educational aspect contributing to the challenges for children who live on-reserve is geographic location. Of the interviews completed by Harper (2000), there was some anxiety among teachers about what sort of pedagogical determination should prevail.

Children in northern, isolated communities have much different priorities and life skills requirements than generational cohorts from more urban centres. Teachers suggested to Harper (2000) that there is a discrepancy in terms of instructional importance. The most ubiquitous concern revolved around teaching children for the preparation of post-secondary, when in fact the majority will not leave the reserve. One interviewee specifically pondered the role of the teacher and what lifestyle school staff were intended to be preparing their students for. The interpretation was whether or not children required more traditional skills necessary for on-reserve life, or skills for a life more in line with colonial expectations. The exposure that children obtain on-reserve does not resemble that which children attain off-reserve.

The learning atmosphere of on-reserve schools is not only different in how children are being taught, but also what they are being taught and who is doing the teaching. The correlation between geographic and cultural representation, teacher transiency, and inadequate funding, are all elements that dominate band-operated schools. While this may sometimes be presented as the

case in the public-school system, there can be no denying that these circumstances present a higher degree of hardship in band-operated schools.

The relevancy of what can be done by a school may not be the key theme in how to improve graduation rates. From a sociological perspective, Kanu (2007) suggested the macro-structural component as a more pressing reason for correlating Aboriginal students with lower achievement in school. As well, Aman (2008) claimed that a higher degree of movement takes place with Aboriginal families and that school mobility created more difficulty in developing successful students.

Direction for improvement. While there is much to be concerned about in Aboriginal Education, there is also no denying that many positive aspects are being implemented and can be further applied to make equal educational attainment a possibility for Native and non-Native children alike. Previous research and articles that study Aboriginal Education have helped shape ideas in how to improve graduation results. Both Kanu (2007), and Labercane and McEachern (1995), describe what cultural context looked like for First Nations students and the benefits of adapting teaching approaches to produce more successful Aboriginal learners.

In a discussion paper by Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998) the issues or reasons for, consequences, and ways to improve the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal graduation rates, were investigated. The initial stage of discussion related to the concept of what culture is, how it can differ among the various First Nations, and how the history of Aboriginal people has been largely misrepresented, or ignored altogether, in education and curriculum. In order for Aboriginal Education to thrive, the dark history that has done so much damage to First Nations people, culture, and the true history, should be taught in school. Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998) suggested that to empower Aboriginal learners, Aboriginal concepts are required

to be utilized in the education process. The issues that encircle the low graduation rates for Aboriginal students were listed and examined with respect to the innumerable variables that interplay as causes for the lack of success.

From this point the article moved to represent some of the more positive occurrences in Aboriginal Education. Three instances of successful implementation of Aboriginal practices were noted. The first was the improved situation for students who attend a school with primarily First Nation ancestry, Joe Duquette High School. By tailoring the school atmosphere with a more tolerant and culturally responsive etiquette, the voice of the students became an important component. The second takes place in a Dene community that based the education structure on continuous student-elder interaction. First language and culture were key elements in the whole process of educating the child. The third example was the Princess Alexandria elementary school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. In this case, there was a focus on teaching the student from where they were in their academic development rather than strictly from a grade or age appropriate level. This form of academic structure was stated by Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998) to be a human rights approach because it adequately supports the child at not only their academic competence, but also at an ideal point for their confidence to flourish in an emotional and physical standpoint. The article concluded that schools must provide a powerful component of “social justice”, as the injustices served upon Aboriginal people historically will never be completely erased.

This discussion paper (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998) provided examples of what successful schooling intervention looked like. The changes to the educational structure in the three examples helped indicate what may be done to help build successful achievement for

Aboriginal students. In order for Aboriginal students to improve graduation rates, changes that offer true results must include community and alternative practices where required.

In looking into the spectrum of effects on education, one must consider all societal levels and decide what must occur from these various components and bodies of authority. In a qualitative study that followed an ethnographic methodology, Kanu (2007) posed the question of what lay as the root cause for low Aboriginal academic achievement. The central theme revolved around the building of a more successful experience in education for Aboriginal students.

Kanu (2007) explored whether the issue stemmed from the classroom curriculum level or whether there was more of a breakdown of social standards that hampered better graduation rates. The results were based on 31 Aboriginal students who were placed in two different grade nine social studies classes. One of the teachers used an Aboriginal based pedagogy that integrated Native perspective and content. This class was referred to as enriched. The other class followed the structure of the dominant, mainstream, understanding of instruction. Through observation, semi-structured interviews, and test and assignment scores, Kanu (2007) related this data to student attendance, participation in classroom activities and the matter of dropout rates. The integration of Aboriginal content did positively influence those students in the enriched class in all categories, thus supporting the notion that a more culturally representative curriculum would enhance Aboriginal success rates. However, there was ample description on the impact that social issues and variables had on these students learning which could still suggest that lower success rates may yet be proven to be a more appropriate reason.

This article (Kanu, 2007) noted the duality of the macro view of society or community is related simultaneously with the micro view of classroom strategies. The integration of

Aboriginal content in the classroom should benefit learners, yet the healthier the community, in terms of Socio-Economic Status, the better the educational results should be too.

Further research for supporting specific classroom strategies was presented by Labercane and McEarchern, (1995). Describing what the early learning experience looked like for First Nations children, this article described much of the common elements of how to build better learning opportunities for First Nation students. With more First Nation students in urban locations than rural areas, there is a described need for teachers to be aware of differences in learning. By connecting these children with their culture, teachers would be providing an integral aspect in the development of confidence and pride in identity. These alone were noted to help with a higher degree of success, but there still can be more done. Literature and books that are more culturally significant do well to serve First Nation learners as bias can be negated.

In terms of assessment, the article (Labercane and McEarchern, 1995) proposed the use of a portfolio as a more effective method of gathering information on student knowledge. The writers recognized the changes that have occurred in First Nation's Education in the decade previous to the article and speculated on what it would look like a decade from the article. However, they stressed the need for an accurate portrayal of First Nation's culture and history in literacy activities would do well to serve early learning for Aboriginal children. Labercane and McEarchern (1995) provided suggestions for literacy related issues that are best conducted with a degree of culture. The recognition of culture and history in literature at an early age can have an impact on the confidence of First Nations children. In order to continue through school and achieve success with the Euro-centric system, the inclusion of content that has significance and importance to early Aboriginal learners may very well help them demonstrate improved results

in Language Arts. If literacy is to have an impact on an individual, it should include evidence of that individual's history.

Aboriginal Education has surfaced into the mainstream by interpreting the exact responsibility and reason of education for Aboriginal children, and specifically, on-reserve First Nations learners and was pertinently described through an ethical lens by Wiltse (2011). When studying in the field of Aboriginal Education, Wiltse (2011) suggested in this research piece that linguistics play a major role in student development and that educators must be cognizant of the specific dialect of Aboriginal learners. This article was written in the mode of a retrospective inquiry and related the connection to how Aboriginal children have lost their first language, yet the influence still remains in their style and way of speaking. These notions were suggested to have strong implications for learning grade appropriate speaking, reading and writing skills. These students could be categorized as English as a Second Dialect learners, thus, there must be a consideration for best practices in the language arts instruction.

Many Indigenous languages were described as extinct, with a great deal more endangered. The root of this loss of a first language had its roots in colonization, and the devastating effects of residential schools. It was suggested that the English used in Aboriginal communities, is in fact a language in and of itself. Wiltse (2011) recognized that there was a bias toward the linguistics of Aboriginal groups because their style of speech is not as fluid and quick paced as the dominant society. The data shared in this article revealed that due to the linguistic traits of Aboriginal speakers, educators must instruct with the pedagogical ideology that Aboriginal dialect do not reflect any deficiency in language acquisition, nor is it a less acceptable method of speaking. The key point brought up was that language differences do not necessarily set the precedent as language difficulty.

Wiltse (2011) noted that the best way to ensure this, was for the home dialect of Aboriginal speakers to be recognized and accepted. As well, it was demonstrated that there are exclusive language skills which Aboriginal children do possess, and a bias toward language development needed to be eliminated for Aboriginal students to be successful. This research stated that the unique language that Aboriginal children use can guide and foster effective classroom instruction. An awareness of this linguistic difference could be better viewed as a strength rather than a weakness is reason enough for developing more confident and successful students.

A final description of how best to work on improving educational achievement was documented by Spence, White and, Maxim (2007). They presented a hypothesis that children educated in Band schools would have lower levels of attainment than those who attend public schools. The sample in this research involved Native and Inuit children from 397 reserves across Canada and was obtained from 1996 census results, as well as Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The data analyzed was from the 1995-1996 school year. As much as the hypotheses holds true in this research, there were variables from nation to nation which had an impact on the accuracy of the results. While the article demonstrated, there was a need for improved academic attainment for Aboriginal learners and school demographics played a role, the health of the community itself was essential to consider. The authors described that there were variables and considerations that must be in place when investigating Aboriginal education.

Whether in the public domain of schooling, or within the independent structure of AANDC schools that operate under the community band administration, factors that contributed to better results for students are available for educators to implement. Research supported the rationale that strategies and methods of instruction do exist which can empower Aboriginal children and allow for them to take charge of their education in order to be confident, driven and successful.

First Nations students graduating from high school, as well going on to complete post-secondary should be the norm, not the exceptions.

Roles of Vested Parties

When it comes to responsibility, or accountability, for the required improvements to occur in Aboriginal Education, there are a few main contributors that are recognizable. From governments at both the federal and provincial level, more must be done to ensure that Aboriginal students have an absolutely equal opportunity as all other children. At the community level, there is an obvious need for involvement by hereditary and elected leaders, as well as the members of the community in general. Teachers are the front-line delivery experts and play a critical role in the educating of Aboriginal students. Finally, of course, the students themselves play a vital role in getting an effective learning experience to take place.

Government and policy makers. At the Federal level comes the responsibility for education for all children on-reserve, while Aboriginal children in public schools are under the provincial governments jurisdiction and responsibility. This dichotomy between levels of governments must cease and begin working together to ensure Aboriginal Education is being well invested both financially and socially.

A report by Mendelson (2008) described the federal government's role with regards to funding and support for those schools that are operated on reserve by the band administration. It was explained that although there were some exceptions, generally, on reserve schools fail to provide First Nation students with the educational outcomes required for sufficient academic development. Getting funding on par with provincial funding would be an initial starting place. It was also recognized that each community school is operated in isolation and that a more universal system of First Nation schools would also enhance the on-reserve schools. While this

may seem viable, there could be interpreted as more government control over education as the need for First Nation control over First Nation education may be over looked in a universal federal system. There was clear understanding though, that the federal government is responsible through Constitutional and Treaty agreements to provide for the education of First Nation children. Mendelson (2008) suggested that a structure of levels needed to be implemented in order for on-reserve schools to improve the outcomes for First Nation children. The four levels described were local community, the whole nation, an organization of many nations, and finally, a linkage of all on-reserve schools in Canada. The interrelated levels were proposed as being able to administer certain policies and overview certain issues.

The view of on-reserve schools had a less than impressive representation in this article and there can be no denying that challenges in these settings are multi-faceted. The guidance that was suggested in this article provided some insight for how best to structure the education system for the band administered schools. It was a much different realm than the public/provincial system, but there must be ways to not only make the school comparable, but to better serve those who need it most. Children on-reserve must get the best opportunity to advance academically while still retaining a sense of cultural integrity.

The amount of funding a school receives parlays directly into the quantity and quality of staff, programs, and resources that schools can utilize. Phillips (2010) presented data that indicates the funding and resources available to First Nations schools to be abysmal. First Nations children are more often diagnosed as requiring special education than their non-Native counterparts, and this classification is also higher in band-schools than in public schools. Philips (2010) detailed the responsibility of the federal government in providing quality education for First Nations children and what the present situation is like. There was an ongoing comparison

between what has been happening at the federal level and at the provincial level. With the provinces providing more support both financially and in terms of the staffing of specialists, it was noted that there was an inability for First Nations schools to feasibly maintain an equal opportunity for special education services. Province by province numbers presented challenges to make comparisons due to different categorization and methods of measurement. They became further skewed depending on INAC records or independent studies. Regardless, the issue that the author raised is the disproportionate level of special education provided for First Nations schools and that something must be done to rectify this injustice. Phillips (2010) indicated the challenges band-operated schools face. The task of educating with subpar resources and funding are but one aspect which First Nations schools have playing against them and they must work all the more direly to demonstrate their ability to develop proficient children.

Time and time again, residential school effects came up in the literature, and my research as well. The legacy that remains from this bungled era of colonial inflicted belief has left a negative impact on today's generation of Aboriginal youth. There has been much done in the attempts to correct the ills perpetrated from the residential school experiment. However, there is much more than can and should continue to happen in order to achieve a better relationship with Aboriginal communities that are still hurting.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established in order for there to be amends made. According to the book published by the TRCC (2015), *A Knock On the Door*, making peace with the past does not end with an apology from the Prime Minister and a lump sum, one time payment of sympathy to Residential School survivors. The true meaning of truth and reconciliation must continue in the form of support both financially and psychologically.

Aboriginal people, and especially those living on-reserve with the lowest of living standards should have better financial opportunity and more available counselling services.

The TRCC (2015) came up with 94 recommendations to act upon that counted on the all levels of government to be true to promises and be more accountable. The topics ranged from Child Welfare, Health, Education, Sports and Media, with the government being called on to correct many of the issues still affecting Aboriginal people in these categories.

In British Columbia, the provincial government has begun to make Aboriginal content and principles of First Nations learning more of a reality in the curriculum. By revamping subject criteria to better reflect the true history of Aboriginal history and culture within Canada, First Nations learners and non-Native learners can gain a more balanced view of what has brought us to the present times in this country. The change in curriculum is but one course of action, and now community leaders and teachers need to take the next step to effectively apply these aspects into the classrooms.

Community leaders and members. After generations of dis-empowering Aboriginal learners, it is high time to recognize the contributions that First Nations people have provided. The voice of Aboriginal people is at the core of improving Aboriginal education and this is no better stated than in the research by Antone (2000). In a case study of the Oneida Nation Antone (2000) included personal accounts of Aboriginal people who have been educated through the mainstream educational system. Data in this article was retrieved from the authors own lived experience, as well as from interviewing other community members. Antone (2000) proposed how best to educate Aboriginal children, which included building pride in their culture through lessons that are embedded with history. In my own research pride came up as a key theme and is further presented in Chapter four. According to Antone (2000), part of being able to express a

sense of pride had to ensure that language and traditional ceremonies were involved in the learning scope of Aboriginal children.

Each Nation being unique, it was posited that individual Nations must instruct about the local territories. The dominant society and Eurocentric ideology of education had done much to prevent this from happening at a school level and this was noted as the reason for a stronger Aboriginal voice being required in educational matters. The article suggested that the original intent of education in previous generation's, was to destroy Aboriginal culture. Antone (2000) stated that government was unsuccessful in the extermination of First Nations culture, and yet presently, education is not providing Aboriginal people with an equal opportunity for success.

As much as it was recognized that Aboriginal voice is on the rise in educational circle, the value of a more traditional form of education would strongly benefit Aboriginal learners. Antone (2000) did make the point that there is no turning back in time. She does not promote to go back to living without present technology, but she encourages a more balanced style of education that would better support not only the Oneida children, but Aboriginal children throughout the country. Antone (2000) demonstrated the dire need for Aboriginal people to be involved in the educational process. Inclusion of community members is integral for ensuring that Aboriginal voice is heard. A curriculum that encompasses traditional values as well as the skills required to be successful in present day society are necessary. In debating whether a band school or public school is more apt to accommodate in this manner could be viewed as the core of my own research.

Teachers. The role of the teacher is the most important, and perhaps the most daunting, of all elements of education to bring Aboriginal students to a more equal footing with their non-

Native peers. Teachers must be up for the challenge and embrace a level of learning themselves, specifically those teachers who are non-Native and work with Aboriginal children.

In order for Aboriginal children to be successful in school, teachers must provide the space and activities for them to flourish. Riley and Ungerleider (2012) investigated the perceptions of teachers with regards to race, class and gender and what impact this had on the Aboriginal student. The research questions consisted of seeking the impression teachers had of Aboriginal students; the reason teachers had these impressions, and, reasons for providing certain direction for these students. The methodology of the research included 21 teacher participants who were to place children in one of three categories, these being a supplemental class, regular class or an advanced class. The participants had only the student record to use as information for placement, and although participants did mention the challenge of using only this record, the results did indicate that there was teacher bias in the placement of half the students.

There was noted surprise by participants that there were Aboriginal children who were exceeding expectations, and a clear recognition that life situations were in some cases, causes for a lack academic achievement. Attributing certain traits to a race was explained as the development of stereotyping. The recommendations included further research on this topic in a variety of settings to find similarities and differences of opinions. Teachers who work more closely with Aboriginal children could have far different perceptions than those who don't. A final idea from Riley and Ungerleider (2012) was to include more Aboriginal curriculum in teacher training courses at the University level. Being aware of how best to support these children may prove to alleviate some of the pre-conceived thoughts of educators.

This research suggested that there was apparent bias towards Aboriginal learners, and that teachers should be able to recognize the need to see the whole child and assess from there rather

than strictly from a Student Record. As Riley and Ungerleider (2012) stated, it was integral to gather information from teachers with experience working with Aboriginal learners to build a concrete view of the opinions of different locations. The teacher's perspective is one of many that are needed to help further Aboriginal academic success rates.

In continuing the view that teachers are in a position to have a particular understanding of Aboriginal education, a study by St. Denis (2010) explored the teacher point of view from the Aboriginal teacher. This research was completed qualitatively and posed the question of how best to provide effective practices for Aboriginal children. It further inquired how the experience of being an Aboriginal educator impacted schools, students and themselves. It was clear that the participants, who represented each province and territory from the public-school system, were eager to share their knowledge in this ethnographic study. The ultimate impact was to create more positive learning possibilities for Aboriginal children. After collecting the data through an open-ended questionnaire and focus group discussions, there was an analysis done through a grounded theory lens.

The four points of focus that St. Denis (2010) found were the philosophical ideology of teaching, use of Native approaches to learning and understanding, discrimination that may occur in education, and finally, those who may be interpreted as support networks for the improvements to Aboriginal education. In the findings, it was recognized that how teachers related to Aboriginal students played a role in how those students developed. The participants suggested that in their position they wished to help foster positive influence on society as a whole, while fostering the aspects of Aboriginal education. Participants expressed there was still a degree of racism that existed in education, although this has taken more subtle and underlying connotations as compared to historical wrongs of race bias. Some of the recommendations that

followed the data analysis included a drive for more Aboriginal teachers, as well as increasing staff members who could be considered as allies. Aside from these capacities, inclusion of more content with a positive Aboriginal perspective, as well as building connections with community members and leaders, were strongly encouraged. Lastly, interactions with all levels of government, schools in both the public and band operated system, and policy makers was seen as a step to overcoming the disproportionate outcomes experienced by Aboriginal learners.

The differences of experience for Aboriginal teachers in the public-school system is a perspective that was worth examining. St. Denis (2010) demonstrated the position and understanding of Aboriginal teachers; an integral component to advancing the topic of Aboriginal education. In comparing band schools with public schools, the teacher in each system may have unique opinions due to the format of their school. The teacher is the possessor of relationships with the children and is best able to effect the change required in the successful development of academic and cultural achievement.

The perspective and opinion of teachers with experience working on isolated reserves in Northern Ontario encapsulates the research undertaken by Harper (2000). The responses and issues raised by the 10 female participants were intended to showcase the concerns that teachers have when living as teachers in these First Nation communities. The purpose of this article was to conclude how best to navigate the teacher and the community working rapport. Other aspects that were investigated were the lived experiences of not only the schooling component, but also the general living aspect. From this data, the researcher hoped to provide insight into teacher training at University Education programs that might better prepare teachers for what to expect and how to deal with the unique conditions of living on-reserve. The teacher participants in this research were pre-dominantly Caucasian, first year teachers. The researcher conducted formal

interviews and continued with informal questioning as the data was being collected. The inclusion of transcribed interview comments gave this article an emotional feeling of the actual, phenomenological, reality.

Teachers struggled with not only the assignment of their job, but the challenges of living in remote conditions also came across as frustrating. Harper (2000) suggested that education programs could better prepare for this experience if there were more special education and ESL courses in pre-service teacher training. Another beneficial aspect could be allowing practicum assignments to take place in some of these communities. The findings also indicated that further support be provided by University Education programs by preparing for these specific types of schools. Harper (2000) put much of the emphasis on preparing teachers for these jobs on the pre-teacher programs. However, the article did conclude that further research is required and that the need to rectify the high teacher turnover rate is necessary.

In conducting this research, Harper (2000) further described the events and circumstances of the on-reserve school situation. The perspective of teacher filters through as a voice that is needed in order to help facilitate adequate learning atmospheres for Aboriginal learners. With the apparent challenges that teachers feel in these setting, there can only be reciprocally inflicted struggles felt by the students. The impact of high teacher turn-over rates upon these children is going to determine how their impression of schooling develops.

Students. The final cog of the education wheel, and the *raison d'être* for the entire education institution, is the students themselves. Ultimately, it is the youth who are developing through the ages of childhood, teenage-hood and towards adulthood, in the schooling system. Therefore, the voice of Aboriginal children is of the utmost importance.

The ability to provide effective learning atmospheres for Aboriginal students was presented by MacIver (2012) whose findings repeated much of the other research that indicated students want more cultural relevancy in their education, which includes history and connecting to traditions. As well, students stated that their pride and confidence could be better shaped were they to feel recognized as important individuals. The research by MacIver (2012) indicated a need to come to terms with what the students feel as the need for ensuring graduation from high school. This perspective was important to learn as it was the students themselves that required the sufficient guidance and support. The method of collecting data in this study was done through phenomenological process of interviewing ten Aboriginal students at risk of drop out. They were posed with semi-structured questions in an interview that explored what would benefit them as they worked towards completion of high school. Data was analyzed by what MacIver stated as “semiotic phenomenology, including description, reduction, and interpretation” (156).

The goal of the study consisted in finding ways to enhance the learning of Aboriginal children and to close the gap between themselves and their non-Aboriginal peers. The lived experience cannot be over-emphasized and this is exactly how I expected the research that I conducted to pan out as well. The voice and opinions of the people in a phenomenological capacity carry powerful data. As much as quantitative data demonstrates where success or failure can occur, the way for change and improvement is better served by being represented through real people, real situations, real life stories.

A final example of the necessity to hear the thoughts and views of the students was presented in a study that was conducted in a Catholic high school for girls, located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Basylak (2002) sought out the opinions and ideas of the students themselves.

The participants were all of Aboriginal ancestry and went through a series of interviews in order to develop a qualitative analysis of school perceptions. Interviews, with open-ended questioning, were conducted in the traditional method of the sharing circle. The format of the study was undertaken with an Aboriginal based structure, as the research was viewed through connections to the Medicine Wheel. Themes were acknowledged through data analysis and Bazylak (2002) went into detail explaining how all the perspectives of the interviewees fit within the dimensions of the medicine wheel. It was noted in the article that too much research focused on the failures occurring within the scope of Aboriginal Education. Therefore, the intent and purpose in this research was to recognize issues that helped support Aboriginal students to attain success.

During sharing circles, the participants revealed factors that influenced their desire to be successful with their education. Some of these factors included the influence of teachers, families, and peers. These were common themes that I found in my own research, in that, family, friends and teachers played a significant role in how children were impacted in their educational experiences. The responses of the participants were important components to include because the contribution of the actual students is supportive of what Aboriginal students require during their school career to ensure success. Through the inclusion of those direct experiences from the participants, Bazylak (2002) was essentially using a phenomenological structure of collecting the data. This element of interviewing, transcribing and coding was directly related to how I admonished the perspectives presented in my study.

Summary

This second chapter continued on with the theme of Aboriginal Education in a review of the professional literature and the many facets that are undertaken in the schooling for First

Nations youth. Ultimately recognizing that the public schools and the band-operated schools both have a specific opportunity to help support Native and non-Native children, there were documented influences upon children in each of these systems. Curwin-Doige (2001) suggested that Aboriginal children have been immersed in learning settings even before there were any European settlers in Canada. The educational parameters after contact and the forced education of First Nations children under the Residential School debacle were not at all suited for the best interest of Aboriginal youth, families, communities, and language and culture (Mason, 1998). All of the aforementioned were severely impacted in a negative way, which has persisted into the mindset of today's First Nations youth (Bell et al, 2004). In the present times, there is more control of Aboriginal Education by Aboriginal entities, yet, obvious inequalities remain in the achievement levels of Native and non-Native students (Mattson and Caffrey, 2001).

Studies that were completed by Philips (2010), Spence, White and Maxim (2007) and Weatherspoon and Schissel (1998) all found that the social setting and living conditions of First Nations people are sub par when compared to the dominant society. Although a higher number of First Nations children grow up in sub standard living conditions, poverty, foster care and have lower educational attainment, Levin (2009) pointed out that there is a great deal of positive change to recognize. He noted that there are more Aboriginal people in university, business, and politics than at any other point in history.

The circumstances for First Nations children who live on-reserve are, in most cases, even more distressing. MacIver (2012) brought to our attention the ideas that on reserve living can be equated with inadequate housing, poorer health and nutrition, and even the inability to access clean drinking water. Also higher are the rates of suicide, unemployment and substance abuse. All of these factors build the conditions for lower socio-economic status, lower graduation rates,

and that this cycle is difficult to break from. Further research was put forth by Goddard and Foster (2002) that explained the loss of language and culture, and the residual impact of residential schools has had an incredibly negative lingering effect upon these communities.

A reserve is a community in the many senses of the word and the work by Agbo (2012) described the most effective route to take for education in these settings. Agbo's suggestion was to educate in the capacity of recognizing a dual-cultural relevancy. This idea of education being to the benefit of the individual and the community as a whole was also supported by Blundo (2010), who claimed that education is central to the ability to increase a positive image of a community. The connection to community, and more specifically, family, was explained by Corbett (2007) as being entrenched in the psyche of community members. There were recognized to be two camps which were firstly, those who remain in the community, or stayers. Stayers were noted to be having stability, while the second group Corbett found where those who saw better opportunity beyond the community and family, called leavers. Leavers were seen as those who had mobility, and this analogy can be directly comparable to the community members from the reserves around this country.

Aboriginal Education has transitioned through a number of phases and at this point in history there are Aboriginal students in the provincial public-school systems and in federally funded band-operated systems. Children can live on-reserve or off-reserve (Richards & Vining, 2004), with the majority, two-thirds, being in the public system and off-reserve. Therefore, it was stated that, although off-reserve children do fare better than their on-reserve compatriots, there are changes that must occur in both settings to bring equality to the graduation rates of Native and non-Native children.

Among the concerns in Aboriginal Education, Aman (2008) claimed transiency of students was an issue, while Harper (2000) studied the role of teachers in isolated communities and the high turnover rate of teachers was established as another difficult aspect of Aboriginal Education. Philips (2010) and Levin (2009) studied the issue of under-funding of on-reserve schools and the over-representation of Native children in the Special Education categories.

Kanu (2007) observed that there were issues at 2 levels of social existence that required improvements. Firstly, the school setting and classroom were viewed as a microcosm, while the community itself was viewed as a macrocosm. It was noted that the healthier the community, the healthier the educational attainment. At the class or school level, there appeared that certain strategies would better support First Nations learners. This was also found to be the case in research by Labercane and McEarchern (1995). When cultural relevance and the true history of First Nations people was applied to learning through a variety of literary portrayals and literature, Labercane and McEarchern discovered a higher degree of pride and confidence among student.

In the end, there are a number of entities and enterprises that must be held accountable and must make the changes to enhance the education for Aboriginal children. At the top of the chain would be government and policy makers. It was suggested by Mendelson (2008) that constitutional rights, treaties and funding should be kept in good faith as well that a structure somewhat like that of a public-school district might help to bring band-operated schools out of isolation and segregation.

Next would be community leaders and members, who have the best voice for implementing appropriate geographical and local significance. Antone (2000) expressly stated that Aboriginal people need to be involved in all education capacities.

The third level of important participants in Aboriginal Education are teachers. Whether Native or non-Native, teachers are like the front-line workers who can apply everyday lessons to build confidence, show empathy towards the historical wrongs and eliminate class and race bias (Riley and Ungerleider, 2012).

Lastly, and certainly not least, are the students themselves. Basylak (2002) interviewed a number of students in order to interpret what the factors for success in education, and it was concluded that family, friends and teachers who role modeled success had the most powerful influence.

Chapter 3: Research Design

The first chapter of this thesis detailed the rationale and reasoning behind my choice in completing this research. The second chapter was the literature review, which examined many of the issues central to the overarching concept of Aboriginal Education. Much of this literature helped to support the research that I had set out to complete. This third chapter will move into the process of explaining the lead up to collecting data, with the continual mindset of the following questions: To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the community in a public elementary school?; What might be the effects of elementary school experiences that influence the high school successes of children from the community?; Is one school system impacting the students more positively than the other?; and, How is it more positively impacting the children, or what might be taking place at this facility that is making it more effective in student achievement?

In this chapter, I will review the methods, designs, and philosophical foundations that guided the research. There will be an introduction to the quantitative and qualitative relevance, and the specific format of the research. Following this, the data collection and analysis will be described. Finally, the interpretation of the data will be briefly discussed. Interspersed within these formal sections, the topics of ethics, recruitment, and details integral to the methodological approach, will be addressed.

The undertaking of this research was a social science process and required a methodology best suited to the topic. The sociological elements and experiences for on-reserve children are much different when compared to other youth in society. This is especially true in the case of

education. In order to gain understanding into the phenomenon of different schooling atmospheres and the educational impact, qualitative research was most beneficial method for this investigation. While a quantitative method would have supported this research in a purely statistical sense, there would not have been any story behind the numbers. Therefore, using a predominantly qualitative structure within a mixed-method approach provided evidence into the how and why students of one school system are impacted as compared to the other.

Phenomenological Theory

Clandinin and Connelly (1998) discussed the narrative importance of hearing first-hand the lived story of a person. Although their study related to school reform and the storying of teachers, significance of this style of research can be recognized as an essential component of the research that I conducted. The relation of people and an institution is expressed through the individual experience and the impact occurred can only be related through the lived knowledge of the person. The stories that were shared by the student, parent, or caregiver, were the stories and perceptions that I needed to hear and learn from. To come to a conclusion regarding what the impacts are for on-reserve children who attend a public school and their peers who attend a band-operated school, those experiences were key to what this research aimed to measure.

I utilized a philosophical belief structured around the reality of living on-reserve and the specific social context of this setting. Therefore, within the hermeneutic lens supported by Heidegger (1962), I applied a phenomenological framework. Heidegger (1962) claimed that in applying phenomenological research, the integral data comes from understanding how or why the phenomenon is portrayed, rather than what the phenomenon is. Each participant's specific perspective, way of knowing, or opinion, provided me with the reasons and a deeper understanding of why the phenomenon was taking place.

In my research, I sought out reasons for Aboriginal students to attend one of the public schools in town, or the community school. All the data collected was meant to be representative of a lived experience, a belief, which described the possible motives for choosing how to educate the elementary aged children of the community.

A phenomenological method of reporting and analysing this research was effective for this study because experiences reported were from people who had first-hand knowledge and the lived experience of education for on-reserve children. The experiences investigated were the core of the data and the participants input was the key component to understanding. These were not lived stories that allowed for me to re-evaluate perspectives. The descriptions of the experiences found through the questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups were the descriptive foundations for the educational impacts of the children in the community.

Further support for doing research in this manner of a phenomenological lens has been expressed by van Manen (1990). He suggested that the essence of a person, or the people, is the unique attribute of phenomenology that proves to be such a positive form of research in the human sciences. This is especially true in the pedagogic sphere of education. Phenomenological research was explained by van Manen (1990) to be a qualitative method that serves to discover meaning in the human experience. He purported that phenomenology is a method encompassing a part of, and a whole sense of, being. In my research, education as the whole was experienced as a multitude of parts, with each part being the individual perspectives or points-of-view

By leaning heavily on the design and methodology noted by van Manen (1990), I not only utilized ideas from a professor and human scientist with Canadian credentials, but I was adapting to the principles of the true meaning of participant narrative.

The research intended to explore the specific perspectives of Aboriginal culture and society and may have been served effectively by the use of an Aboriginal based method. Carpenter and McMurphy-Pilkington (2008) explored the education of Maori and Pakeha students in New Zealand under a method that they stated to be action research of a qualitative nature that is Maori-centred. Both these researchers identify as being Maori, and Pakeha. However, there is no amount of experience that I could gain as an Aboriginal educator that would bestow upon me the ability to speak as an Aboriginal, let alone conduct research in an Aboriginal realm.

Another investigative method that could have been considered was the ethnographic strategy. Poverty is a social factor that negatively influences Aboriginal communities. Economic inequalities are a change that Berg and Lune (2012) suggested a critical ethnographic researcher would anticipate from this form of research. While I do empathize with the educational and economic inequalities that have abounded since colonialization, that is only a portion of what I sought to understand. My intention was not to express my own interpretations, but to extrapolate the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of the community members. All the data collected expressed the impacts for First Nation students living on-reserve when options for elementary schooling existed.

The composition of this research stemmed from the understanding of the viewpoints of participants. The participants involved were from the two different educational systems and their stories provided evidence of what community members perceived as the most positive elementary schooling experiences. Accordingly, the research investigated how to successfully provide the most beneficial educational experiences for First Nation's children. The specific aim in this research was to understand the division of belief, with regards to whether a public school

or band-operated school presented the better elementary educational experience for Aboriginal students. The fact that all data was opinion based helped confirm that a phenomenological structure would best serve to answer the research question.

Research Design

The community values the development of its members and recognizes success as progress through the levels of education. Therefore, seeking out how best to provide this venue for the youth of the community seemed a task that would benefit this generation of students, and those generations to follow.

The work of other researchers supported the notion that improvements and changes must occur on many levels in order for First Nations learners to be on par with non-Native students (Bell et al, 2004; Levin, 2009; Richards & Vining, 2004). There is also ample research documenting that children raised on-reserve have a great number of disadvantages in a social context and educational context (Harper, 2000; MacIver, 2012; Wotherspoon, 2006). Family members in the community where I work and conducted this research, actively seek the best educational opportunities for their children and have different opinions about how this should take place. When family members decide to send their child or children to one school system or the other, they have reasons for their decision, and I wanted to explore these thoughts of the community members.

My aim in conducting this research was to investigate the elementary school experiences of children who have grown up on-reserve and the impact of their elementary school years upon their educational successes. These children had been through one of two different school systems; either a public-school system off-reserve, or a band-operated school on-reserve. My query aimed to determine what these two different educational opportunities provided for

students and what might have been lacking in the effective development of the children.

Participants were chosen from community members who had recently completed high school, or were close to completion of high school. The points of view from both the student, and the parent or guardian was the key data utilized. The voice of First Nations was the core of my research. Gathering thoughts and beliefs from community members allowed for me to verify reasons for choosing the public-school or opting for the community school.

Ethics

This research was conducted on a small reserve in Northwestern British Columbia. The community has been impacted by social trauma. The development of the railroad, the residential schooling era, the suffrage of living on “The Highway of Tears” and having missing and murdered women from this community, has meant that turmoil and struggle are at the core of the community’s growth.

Data were collected from March 2016 until December 2016. Specifically, the quantitative data were gathered between March 2016 and June 2016. The qualitative data collection commenced in July 2016 and were completed in December 2016.

There were a number of reasons that I chose this community as a site for research. First of all, as an educator, all of my teaching experience has been on-reserve, both in Northern Ontario and Northern British Columbia. This, research that was central to Aboriginal Education had value in my own professional development and my personal role as a teacher of First Nations children. Secondly, I have been working in this community for nearly ten years and have a level of trust and confidence with not only students, but whole families. This allowed for a greater degree of comfort when it came to approaching participants.

As a non-Native researcher conducting research in a First Nation community, I was conscious of my own potential biases that might have influenced data collection or interpretation. To ensure that this was recognized, I reflected on my years as an educator immersed in Aboriginal settings and remained cognizant that I have strong connections with the community; however, without having family there, at no time could I ever be considered a member of the community.

By conducting research in this community, I felt that I could provide support for the positive educational growth of this generation of students, as well as those that will follow. I continually had the best interest of this community, and by extension all First Nations communities, at the forefront of my considerations. I sought out community members to help guide my investigation.

There were steps required prior to beginning the collection of data which included the consideration of ethical concerns and getting Research Ethics Board approval (See Appendix A). Because this research took place on-reserve, there were proper channels to go through in order to access a number of consents. Initially, there was permission that I had to acquire from the Band council and administration. I presented a letter to the band manager (Appendix B) stating my objectives, who brought it forward to chief and council at a council meeting. I was given a letter of consent (Appendix C) to conduct the study with the stipulation that I present my findings at a council meeting when the thesis was completed.

The community holds strong to the traditional protocol of the feast system and governance of hereditary clan chiefs. I approached the Hereditary Chief whose territory this research occurred in, and consulted with him regarding my research. He discussed with me how this territory came to be under this clan and some of the important aspects of his lineage. In the

end, he wished me well to do my research in the community. As well, community members are the essential voice of this research and the use of proper cultural protocol was ensured to demonstrate respect for culture and community.

In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, I ensured that all details of the research were explained beforehand to participants, both orally and in written format. Berg and Lune (2012) identified that although confidentiality and anonymity are each an expressly different idea, they are both mandatory to conducting ethical research. Guaranteeing anonymity in small communities can pose some challenges. Letters of consent also laid out a brief summary of my research, and how I would be utilizing the information that I collected. (see Appendices D, E, F, and G for examples of the letters of consent). In reporting the results, I have refrained from the use of participants' names or any other direct reference that may have indicated specific people involved in the study. This was achieved by referring to participants as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so forth.

Another ethical consideration was that feelings and emotions of animosity towards each of the school system supporters might have been evoked in the focus group discussions and interviews. Therefore, the public-school participants and the band school participants were in separate settings to prevent any negative encounter that could have potentially arisen. A final consideration was that there could have been unresolved trauma from previous educational experiences of participants. This being the case, I provided names and contact information for counselling services to address any social or emotional risks that may have affected a participant.

The only aspects of having a vulnerable population in this research was the use of questionnaires and the focus group discussions with participants under the legal age. These

participants required parental consent. The remainder of the participants were of legal age and were not on the periphery of social susceptibility.

Research Methods

Collecting quantitative and qualitative data helped me to gain a deeper insight into the research question, thus making the research mixed methods. Using these two data collection methods allowed for me to view opinions as a consensus. In other words, with the quantitative results that I analyzed, I could formulate what the general consensus of the community thought or believed. Next, I was able to gather more intimate and unique perspectives through the qualitative data.

Data collection was supported by the notion of triangulation through exercising three types of participant responses. Using a questionnaire, which provided quantitative data, as well as having focus groups and interview data, supported this concept of triangulation. Berg and Lune (2012) described triangulation as collection of data from a range of approaches. Implementing triangulation through these three techniques was sufficient in gathering the necessary information for this research. The image on the following page demonstrates how the effect of triangulation supported the elements of data collection in my research.

Another component of data collecting was the reinforcement of saturation. The input that came from both parents and students with the lived experience of one or the other systems of elementary schooling was necessary. Ultimately, that was four sets of data from 12 sources within the qualitative component of this research. The perspective offered by each cohort ensured that data were well-rounded and qualitatively sound. Again, triangulation of participants added to the surety of attaining the most fundamental input from a variety of voices.

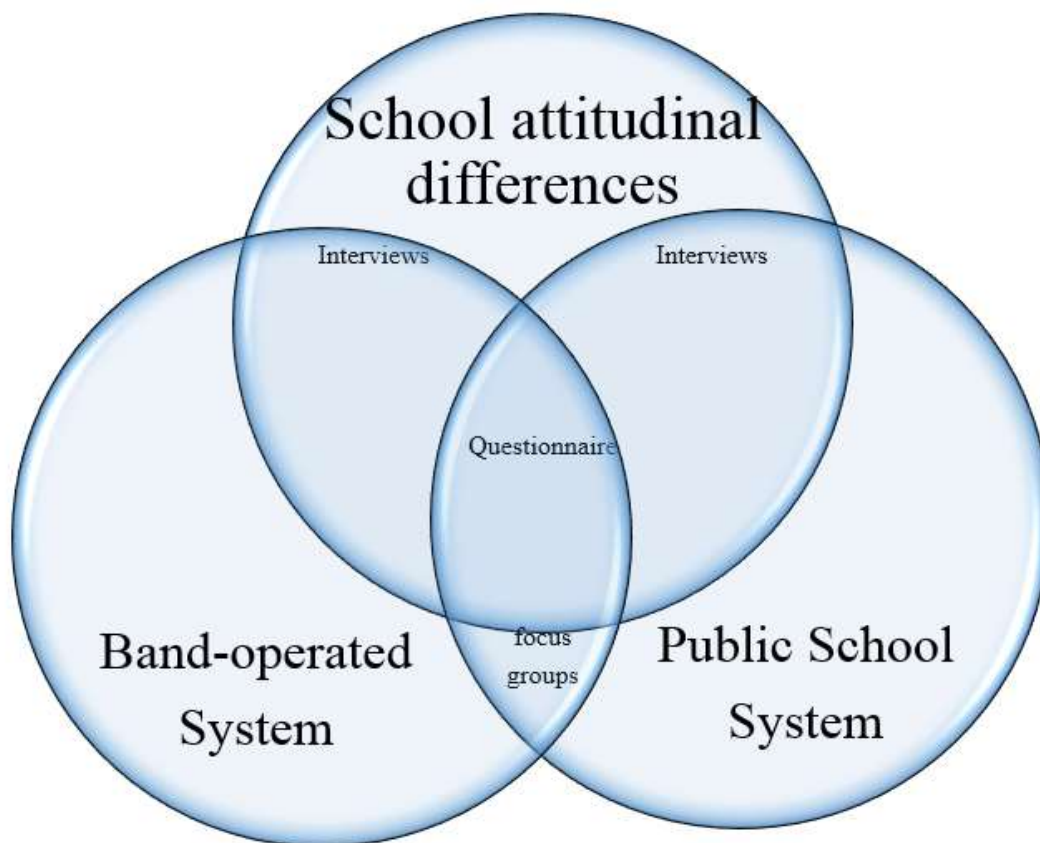


Figure 1. Venn diagram depicting the overall of band-operated system, public school system, school attitudinal differences as captured by the research methods of questionnaire, interview, and focus groups. (Burgess, 2017)

Quantitative methods. Quantitative data was especially helpful in my research because it allowed for a larger set of participants with one instrument. Creswell (2014) stated that the survey is the more preferred data collection method in a quantitative study. It allows for a generalization to be presumed from a population, which was exactly the intent of my research. Gathering the general thoughts and opinions from four different groups, students who had attended the band-operated school, students who attended a public school, and parents of each,

gave me the opportunity to compare and contrast, and analyze the feelings about elementary education in the community.

Questionnaire. The first step for collecting data was distribution of the questionnaire to as many families as possible. These families had recently had children enrolled in one of the three elementary schools in the district schools in town, as well as those having attended the band-operated school in the community. The Band Manager and Education Director had access to information that confirmed the families who had children attending schools in the town. I then hand delivered the questionnaire to parents or guardians of households. As far as accessing parents with children in the community school, this was achieved through a familiarity of having worked with them presently, or in years past.

The questionnaires were designed according to a Likert Scale of responses where participants responded to statements through a range of strongly agreeing (5) to strongly disagreeing (1). The last few questions allowed for participants to express further opinions or complete more detailed answers. These were included in the qualitative reporting. (see Appendix H for student questionnaires and Appendix I for parent/guardian questionnaire).

The gathering of quantitative data was derived from a strategy of non-probability sampling, and included purposive and convenience sampling. Berg and Lune (2012) expressed this mode of attaining responses from participants as effective because there is clear involvement and interest in the questionnaire. All of the respondents were actively involved in the educational process and had first-hand experiences to contribute to the collection of data. The effect of this research was to gain understanding of the lived experiences of individual citizens and for me to learn and understand the position of the participants. A convenient sample allowed me to access all possible community members input. Participants were proximally available and

in terms of accessing families in the community, the convenience sampling expanded the range of participants.

In an attempt to increase the number of questionnaires that were returned, I provided an extrinsic motivator by putting the names of those who completed and returned the questionnaire into a draw for a gift card to the local gas bar. Participants were informed that if they wished to be entered in the draw that they would give up anonymity, however all responses remained anonymous and confidential. Names were not on the questionnaire, but participants filled out a separate card for the incentive. The chance to win a gift card or other reward was an attempt to attain the highest amount of data possible. Even with this incentive, I had to return to some households in order to retrieve the questionnaires. There were other households that required a second copy of the questionnaire due to losing it or misplacing it, and there were some households that did not return it at all.

Questionnaires were then scrutinized by me, responses were tabulated, ranges and medians were formulated, and evidence of different impacts were recognized. For example, when students responded if there were difficult subjects, the students from the band-operated school had a median of 3, undecided, with a range of 2-5. The public-school students had a median of 5, strongly agree, and a range of 4-5. The parents' responses varied from the students' slightly. Parents from the band-operated school had a median of 3.5, undecided, with a range of 1-5. At the same time, parents of the public school had a median of 4, agree, with a range of 2-5. This alone was valuable data, for it demonstrated that the general feeling was that the public school provided a more academically challenging setting, while the band-operated school could improve on building a program with a higher degree of difficulty in the coursework. These findings are discussed in much more detail in the fourth and fifth chapters. All in all, the

questionnaire was a useful and beneficial tool in relaying the material to be covered during interviews and focus groups, which were the next forms of data collected.

Qualitative methods. The quantitative data provided me the ability to understand the thoughts of the participants in a general capacity, as well as to give concepts from the questionnaire a numerical value. However, it was the qualitative data that was most influential and informative of the information. The words and stories of the participants was the valuable information that I wanted to attain in my study. According to Creswell (2012), the use of qualitative data is most advantageous when exploring a social phenomenon. In the case of my research surrounding elementary educational experiences, the social fabrication of reason and choice for an elementary school setting was at the core of the resulting analysis.

To reach a point of saturation, as well as ensuring that there was concrete assurance of reliability and validity, I selected a sample of the participants who were willing to participate in focus groups and interviews. Participants included in this qualitative component of the research were again informed that they give up anonymity if they were willing to be involved, but their responses remained anonymous. I also re-iterated that I would be remaining in confidence of our interview and they should respect confidentiality also. The method for selecting potential participants to provide qualitative data was done through a process of a probability strategy of the stratified random sampling. Berg and Lune (2012) described stratified random sampling as selecting a group that is illustrative of the whole. In other words, the responses gathered from participants through interviews, was data that would have been similarly expressed by any other potential participant.

Individual interviews. The spontaneous responses that came from interviews provided for enlightening results. In this research, I employed individual interviews that consisted of three

parents or guardians of children who attended a public elementary school in the town, and three parents or guardians of children who were from the community band-operated school. This individual interview process consisted of semi-structured questions and had a duration of thirty to forty minutes. The semi-structured style of interview was best-suited, as it allowed the interviews to have flow and order, while also allowing for exploration or prompting for more in depth responses. These open-ended, semi-structured interviews followed a given format but also allowed for unique response potential. The relation between gathering information from participants through interviews has been suggested by Kvale (1996), and Wimpenny and Gass (2000), to correlate well with the phenomenological method that was used in this research. The lived experiences that were captured through the interview process provided for true meaning. As well, the descriptions from participants ensured that data was expressed from those who have direct knowledge of the topic.

The formulation of the interview process was described by both Creswell (2012), and Kvale(1996) to follow a structure that commences with introductory questions, progressing into more core inquiries that reflect the research question. Directive interview questions were what the interviews set out to ascertain, while probing questions got into the deeper meaning of participant statements. As a beginning interviewer, I needed to ensure a commitment to listening to responses intently and allow for speakers to share all their details. Doody (2012) claimed that interviews do provide for powerful data, but the researcher must take care to follow protocol and work to ensure the interviewee is comfortable and able to respond with confidence (see Appendix J for a sample of the interview questions). All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, then transcribed by me, and finally coded and themed. The advantage to including individual qualitative interviews was that unanticipated data may otherwise not have come to

fruition. Furthering the lived experience discussion that was crucial to this research, I moved from having collected the adequate interview data to collecting data from focus group discussions.

Focus group discussions. Focus group interviews were similarly semi-structured in form, and ran approximately the same duration at the interviews. The use of focus groups is explained by Morgan (1997) as being beneficial to gathering qualitative data because there is the utilization of an interactive setting that allows for conversation and dialogue. Likewise, Cheng (2007) described the effectiveness of focus group discussion through bringing people with a commonality together to describe their own experiences within the given topic. In the case of this research, those lived experiences of students who had attended a specific school setting had, the first-hand knowledge to share. There was a level of comfort among the focus group members being able to share ideas that were consistent with elementary school familiarity.

The focus groups included three students from public schools in town and three students having attended the band-operated community school. The focus group of students from the district schools in town turned out to be a single interview with a female, then a focus group with two males. Coordinating schedules proved to be a difficult task, and there were no-shows and rescheduling required on more than one occasion. The community school students included two females and a male. The groups were chosen to create a representation of both genders. This was to ensure that the research included as close to equal representation from each population of participants as possible. The phenomenological component of this data collection encompassed discussions which revolved around the lived experiences of community members; of the children and parents who decided where best to place themselves for elementary education (see Appendix K for the focus group discussion questions).

I included an option for interviews and focus groups to take place at a more neutral location, such as the health station or adult education centre. This was accepted by some of the interviewees. It is worth noting that the band office, community gym, feast hall and school are all part of the same building, and are public spaces that are utilized and available to all community members. The setting for individual interviews were conducted at a workplace office, two were at the homes of the participants and three were completed in the community school library. The focus group interviews were conducted in the community school library and all of these engagements took place on a variety of weekday evenings and weekends.

After all interviews and focus group discussions were completed, I had the task of transcribing the recorded data into a Microsoft Word document. With all collecting of quantitative data from the questionnaires finished, and both the interviews and focus group discussions completed to support the qualitative, social science aspect of this research, I moved into the analyzing of information.

Data Analysis

All data collected in the questionnaires was stored in a locked file cabinet in the basement of my home. The results that were recorded, as well as all transcription from interviews and focus groups, were saved to a USB device and was also stored in the locked file cabinet.

The initial analysis encompassed reviewing the responses to the questionnaire. This quantitative data was expressed in a numerical sense and the data was observed as the most common responses, least common responses, or finding commonalities of the content.

All interviews and focus group discussions required the process of analyzing the data and this data demanded a deeper examination. As Saldana described (2009), coding is what the

researcher does with the information gathered and investigated from participants, before describing these results. This being the case, all interviews and focus group discussions were coded before a complete description or dissemination was written in the research findings.

Coding reinforced the development of various patterns and themes from the data. With this information, the elements that had prominence in the participant responses were recognized and maneuvered into categories. The six elements that Saldaña (2009) noted as characteristics for recognizing patterns include “similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, causation” (p. 6). The work and time put into this coding of data provided a rich validation of what was represented in the findings. The coding included multiple cycles in order to review the interviews and focus group discussions from different perspectives. The categorizing and theming was effective for organizing all the data.

Having also gathered the questionnaires, there was the opportunity to describe some responses that were tallied. This data was visually represented in chart form, which helped to display items of higher and lower impact upon the educational experiences of Aboriginal children.

The ability to formulate results through these three data collection methods helped inform how the students were impacted, in order to have had beneficial experiences in elementary school. Education is regarded as integral to move one’s social standing out of the rigours of poverty. The task of educators is to ensure that Aboriginal children have the opportunity to excel in their schooling and to provide the best possible experience for them. Through all of the data analysis processes of this research it had become clear that there was certainly a variance of what sort of impact attendance in each schooling system had upon the lives of on-reserve children.

Some of the codes or themes that became evident through the data collection, included family, pride/confidence, appropriate learning and academics, local connections and conveniences, inter-racial relationships, traditional/cultural values and skills. *Family* was an aspect that came up as a key theme. Whenever a participant mentioned any family member, such as a parent, grandparent, sibling, aunt, uncle or cousin, this was coded as family. The familial aspect of living on-reserve cannot be underestimated. *Pride/confidence* was another established theme and this referred to the state of mind or feeling of a particular instance or circumstance. An example of this was when a student was explaining her commitment towards her development and her own career path, and it was coded as pride/confidence. *Appropriate learning and academics* was indicated as having come out of the elementary school with the academic skills to transition with ease into the course work at the high school level. So, when a student stated that she struggled in high school because she never really learned math, this was a clear example of the need for appropriate learning and academics. *Local connections and conveniences* meant that proximity to home played a role in the development of the child. When a parent said that the kids are lucky, they just have to go a few little steps down to the school, this was a response that was coded as local connections and conveniences. *Inter-racial relationships* were meant to exemplify the ability for children to blend into a multi-cultural setting. One parent claimed that you don't have to like the people, but you've got to learn to live with them and work with them, and this was coded as inter-racial relationships. *Traditional/cultural values and skills* referred to the use or knowledge of First Nations history and expertise. Therefore, a parent stating that the schools should be bringing in hunters and trappers to teach them that stuff, and not just the language, this became coded as traditional/cultural values and skills.

This was not an exhaustive list, but indicative of the ideas that had relevance, importance and consistence. The evidence from children who attended the community school and that of the children who travelled to the town for elementary school have been impacted a great many ways. Some of these impacts were similar while some were very unique to the school systems. It was this knowledge that I wished to share with the local community as well as others involved in Aboriginal Education. The findings of this impact and how it could be applied to achieving higher graduation rates for Aboriginal learners is the core pretense.

Chapter Summary

The research I undertook was asking for the thoughts and perspectives of the community members. Therefore, a method that was most suitable to investigate the real-life experiences of on-reserve children with regards to their educational impressions had to be based in a social science context.

While it is true that a quantitative research method may have been able to provide solid numbers emphasizing how well each system is doing in terms of getting children to achieve success with graduating high school, there would not have been any social parameter to this. The dominant content of this research was in the qualitative realm and allowed for a truly people-oriented conclusion. This alone was the strength of the research and the reason that a phenomenological method was best suited. Initially compiling quantitative data through a questionnaire, I then gathered qualitative data which supported the person-based narrative of the interviews and focus groups.

There were some ethical considerations including parental or guardian consent for underage participants, as well as maintaining a respectful and culturally appropriate tone in all interactions. Gaining permission and access to participants required particular avenues as the

band office and hereditary chief of this clan territory were consulted prior to any data collection occurring.

There were only local community members involved in data collection as participants. The results took aim at how to best support the whole community in demonstrating the strengths and areas requiring improvement in educating the children. Furthermore, the audience who would gain from this research included the local band and council, parents and school staff. The extended benefit of this study was also intended for all Aboriginal educators, and specifically, all reserves that provide educational services through a band-operated school. Any entity, whether it human or agency, that serve Aboriginal communities are potential stakeholders in the research.

Chapter 4: Findings

The first chapter of this paper detailed the rationale for my choice in completing this research. The second chapter was the literature review, in which I examined many issues central to the overarching concept of Aboriginal Education. In the third chapter, I reviewed the methods, designs, and philosophical foundations that guided the research, the quantitative and qualitative relevance, and the specific format of the research.

In this fourth chapter, I will provide results of the data as well as recognize the role of both the quantitative and qualitative results in the research. Initially, I will begin by giving a broad description of the Likert-scale questionnaire results that came from the four groups of respondents to frame the study. These quantitative data were effective in providing a general understanding of community opinions and beliefs on education, and was essential in strengthening the qualitative data. After this, I will move into the reporting of the qualitative data and the resulting themes and ideas that stemmed from the interviews and focus group discussions.

Quantitative Research Findings

Once I had collected as many questionnaires as I could, I began to formulate the responses. There were 26 returned questionnaires altogether and this included seven from former students of the band-operated school, 8 parents of former students of the band-operated school, five former students of a public school, and 6 parents of former students of a public school. These questionnaire responses were organized in a way that I could see the numbers behind the questions. In other words, how many people felt a certain way about a certain statement. The questionnaire topics were grouped into two elements. Firstly, how did the

respondent feel about the student's elementary school and secondly, what did the elementary school provide in the development and high school preparation for the students.

The first of the research findings will revolve around the questionnaire that had statements regarding how they felt about the school (see Tables 1-4) and then review the findings in the questionnaire that focussed on statements about what the school provided (see Tables 5-8). All of the questions fell under the common themes that emerged from the qualitative themes.

The participants in the quantitative component were from either the public schools or the band-operated school, and were parents and former students of the elementary institutions. I received only a portion of all the questionnaires that I had distributed. My goal was to have a higher number of questionnaires, and there were some cases in which the questionnaires did not get returned. Some reasons for not completing the questionnaires were given, such as one student stating that "her mom just wouldn't care enough anyway." I approached some families twice, in order to provide some motivation to complete the questionnaire and this helped in some cases. However, I felt that pursuing families more than that would not have improved the participation rate, and may have been viewed in a more negative or coercive way.

The number of parents that completed the questionnaires for the public schools was six, with a total of ten (60% returned rate) that had been distributed, while the number of parents that filled out questionnaires for the band-operated schools was eight out of ten (80% returned rate). There were parents that had more than one child, so the number of student participant possibilities was slightly higher. Of the students, there were five questionnaires out of a possible twelve (42% returned rate) completed for the public schools and seven questionnaires out of eleven (64% returned rate) filled out for the band-operated school.

The reporting of these results was based on median scores, outliers and ranges. Each of these measurement techniques offered a glimpse into opinions and beliefs of the participants. The median scores were indicators of averages and provided for what a typical opinion had been. This was an important indicator, however, more interesting were the ranges and outliers. These aspects of measurement gave evidence that was beyond just an average. Ranges provided for recognition of the span of responses, and outliers were evidence that there was a response that was significantly outside the average. Response to the Likert scale questionnaire were fashioned numerically with 1 meaning strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree.

While most medians were 3 (undecided) or 4 (agree), there were instances when it dropped to 2 (disagree), and in a few other cases was up to 4.5, and 5 (strongly agree). For example, in response to *what the elementary school provided for physical education training*, both student groups had a median of 4 (agree) and a range of three to five. However, parent responses were quite different. For the band-operated school the median was 4 (agree), yet the range was one through four. This demonstrated that the choice of 1 (strongly disagree) was an outlier. As for the parents of the public schools, the median was 5 (strongly agree) with the response of five also being an outlier. From this I deduced that with regards to the Physical Education programs, parents from the public schools felt that there was an extremely positive impact in those schools for the First Nations students, when comparing a band-operated elementary school with the public system. While both groups of students and the band-operated school parents felt a fairly positive impact in the Physical Education programs, there were still some band-operated school parents that felt the impact was in a negative condition.

Further compiling of the questionnaire responses provided a deeper understanding of the issues that participants felt were relevant and I was better able to conclude that there were

varying degrees to which students were impacted in their elementary school experiences. Specifically, I will discuss each of the following themes in detail individually; *family*, *pride/confidence*, *appropriate learning and academics*, *local connections and conveniences*, *inter-racial relationships*, and *traditional/cultural values and skills*.

The fifth chapter will explain in greater detail my evaluation and complete analysis of the data. The discussion will be centered around the themes that emerged in the research, and the reciprocity of these formative educational structures.

Questionnaire responses to how they felt about the school. The first questionnaire looked at the thoughts and feelings of the participants, which was based on the themes of, *inter-racial relationships*, *local connections and conveniences*, and *pride/confidence*. Antone (2000) suggested that retrieving information from the community members supports the unique stance of the particular First Nation. The statements in this questionnaire sought out the responses from participants about their own feelings; what their own impact might have felt like.

In Table 1 and Table 2, the results indicated that there were some fundamental differences in student perception on how they were impacted by their elementary school experiences. The most notable aspects of those students from the band-operated school and students of the public schools included the themes of inter-racial relationships, and local connections and conveniences. This was evidenced in the responses of feeling safe and comfortable, where 100% of band-school students agreed or strongly agreed, while 60% of the students from the public school agreed or strongly agreed. As well, feeling of connectedness to students and staff was 100% agreed by band-operated school students, and it was 40% agreed or strongly agreed by public-school students and 60% remained undecided.

Table 1

Students of Band-operated school response to how they felt about the school

	1	2	3	4	5	Median
I was safe and comfortable	-	-	-	5	2	4
The teachers helped me to learn to my best ability	-	-	-	5	2	4
I was cared for	-	-	-	5	2	4
Learning was important	-	-	-	6	1	4
There were difficult subjects	-	3	1	2	1	2
I was bullied or ignored	2	3	1	-	1	2
There was opportunity for fun activities	-	-	-	4	3	4
I was being prepared for high school	-	2	2	2	1	4
Connected to the students and staff	-	-	-	7	-	4
Proud of where I was	-	-	-	5	2	4

Note. Responses are made on a five-point scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree. Burgess, 2017)
(n=7)

Pride and confidence were also noted through the responses to feeling cared for, of being bullied or ignored, and of being proud of where they were. The first two comparisons were markedly similar, however, 100% of the students from the band-operated system agreed or strongly agreed with being proud of where they were, whereas 40% agreed or strongly agreed, 40% were undecided, and 10% strongly disagreed among the public school's students.

The responses from parents of children who had attended the public schools and who had attended the band-operated school had some commonalities as well. Yet there was a clear

Table 2

Students of public school response to how they felt about the school

	1	2	3	4	5	Median
I was safe and comfortable	-	1	1	1	2	4
The teachers helped me to learn to my best ability	-	-	1	2	2	4
I was cared for	-	-	-	3	2	4
Learning was important	-	-	-	3	2	4
There were difficult subjects	-	-	-	2	3	5
I was bullied or ignored	1	2	-	1	1	2
There was opportunity for fun activities	-	-	-	3	2	4
I was being prepared for high school	-	1	-	3	1	4
Connected to the students and staff	-	-	3	1	1	3
Proud of where I was	1	-	2	1	1	3

Note. Responses are made on a five-point scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree. Burgess, 2017)
(n=5)

difference in how they felt their children were impacted by the elementary school setting. The clearest example of a difference was not so much the specific results in themselves. The medians from all responses were generally a four, yet the ranges in the responses from the parents of the band-operated system were wider. All but three of the responses from the public-school's parents had a range of 4 to 5, while the band-operated parents range was 3 to 5 for all but two of the responses. So, when the parents responded to the statement about whether their

child *was being prepared for high school*, 100% of the public school's parents agreed or strongly agreed. This is a higher response than the band-operated parents in which 75% agreed or strongly agreed, but there was still 25% who were undecided.

Table 3 and Table 4 show the results of the parent responses. These parent's results also showed how different the thoughts of the parents and children were. I found it surprising that for this response of *being prepared for high school*, both the ranges for students was 2 to 5, while band-operated parents were a 3 to 5 range and public schools parents was 4 to 5. From this data, I could conclude that students felt less certain about the elementary school experience on how it impacted their transition into high school. Whereas, the parents of both school systems were somewhat more confident.

Comparatively observing the parent responses to the children responses likewise showed similarities and differences. While all responses to the statement that the student was *proud of where they were*, all response medians were 4 (agree), except the students of public schools was a 3 (undecided). It was also the widest range. One interesting aspect that I found in these questionnaire results was that the students from the band-operated school and the parents from the public schools were almost identical in ranges and medians.

Looking at these data was helpful in relating it to my research question, *To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the community in a public elementary school?*. As well, I examined the following questions: What might be the effects of elementary school experiences that influence the high school successes of children from the community?; Is one school system impacting the students more positively

Table 3

Parents of Band-operated school response to how they felt about the school

	1	2	3	4	5	Median
He/she was safe and comfortable	-	-	2	5	1	4
The teachers helped him/her to learn to his/her best ability	-	-	1	6	1	4
He/she was cared for	-	-	1	6	1	4
Learning was important	-	-	2	5	1	4
There were difficult subjects	1	2	1	3	1	4
He/she was bullied or ignored	1	4	2	1	-	2
There was opportunity for fun activities	-	-	1	6	1	4
He/she was being prepared for high school	-	-	2	5	1	4
Connected to the students and staff	-	-	3	4	1	4
Proud of where my child was	-	-	3	4	1	4

Note. Responses are made on a five-point scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree. Burgess, 2017)
(n=8)

than the other?; How is it more positively impacting the children, or what might be taking place at this facility that is making it more effective in student achievement?. I could come to evaluate what the impacts were suggested to be both negative and positive. The viewpoints of the students, who experienced elementary school first hand, and their families, who saw the experience from a different angle, allowed to for me to find a general feeling of satisfaction in how the children were impacted.

Table 4

Parents of public school response to how they felt about the school

	1	2	3	4	5	Median
He/she was safe and comfortable	-	-	-	5	1	4
The teachers helped him/her to learn to his/her best ability	-	-	-	5	1	4
He/she was cared for	-	-	-	5	1	4
Learning was important	-	-	-	3	3	4
There were difficult subjects	-	1	1	2	2	4
He/she was bullied or ignored	2	3	-	-	1	2
There was opportunity for fun activities	-	-	-	3	3	4
He/she was being prepared for high school	-	-	-	5	1	4
Connected to the students and staff	-	-	1	4	1	4
Proud of where my child was	-	-	-	3	3	4

Note. Responses are made on a five-point scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree. Burgess, 2017)
(n=6)

Questionnaire responses to what the elementary school provided. The second questionnaire that participants completed was based more on the ability of the school to provide various aspects of education. Observing the results from this questionnaire allowed for further comparisons to abound. In the Report on the 2015-2016 Tripartite Education Framework Agreement Data (2016), the difficulty of increasing Aboriginal success rates was evident in First Nations schools and public schools alike. The goal in my research was to arrive at an

understanding of what the participant thought each school was successful in doing and what the school might need to improve, to ensure a positive impact upon the education of these First Nation students. Table 5 and Table 6 show the results from the student responses. The two key themes from this questionnaire were *appropriate learning and academics* and *traditional/cultural values and skills*.

Overall, student responses all had a median of four. The only exception was to the statement *the elementary school provided First Nations culture and history*. The public-school student's response median was three. The ranges in this response were also significant, in that 43% of band-operated students were undecided, 43% agreed, and 14% strongly agreed. The results for the public-school students had a distinctly different portrayal, with 60% undecided and 40% agreed. Therefore, what this data showed was that although nearly half the participants of both school systems recognized a positive impact in being taught First Nations culture and history, there were still just under and just over half that felt unsure about it. This would lead me to believe that more needed to be done to more positively impact the students in the education of First Nations culture and history.

The questionnaires from the parents and guardians likewise represented responses allowing me to reflect on what the school provided for the children from an alternative point of view. Tables 7 and 8 show these results. While it was the children who had the experience of being in the school, the parent's view of the impact upon the children had value in my query.

The data collected in the parent questionnaires had similarities and differences. Comparing how parents from each school system rated the statements on the questionnaire, and how these results presented next to the student responses was supportive of my research. Finding the impacts upon children who had educational experiences in two different schooling

Table 5

Students of Band-operated school response to what the elementary school provided

	1	2	3	4	5	Median
Knowledge of technology use	-	-	2	4	1	4
Physical education training	-	-	2	3	2	4
Effective reading and writing lessons	-	-	2	4	1	4
The math skills I needed	-	1	2	4	-	4
The opportunity to learn about the world	-	2	1	2	2	4
First Nation's culture and history	-	-	3	2	1	3

Note. Responses are made on a five-point scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree. Burgess, 2017)
(n=7)

systems were becoming evident.

For example, parent responses were also dominated by a median of 4, with the exception of the public-school parent's median at 5 for *physical education training* and of the band-operated school parent's median of 3.5 for *First Nations culture and history*. Again, it was the ranges and outliers that provided for a more insightful understanding of the impact upon the children.

As with the questionnaire comparison of the band-operated students and the public-school students, the range and outliers where were the most obvious differences took place in parent responses. With such similarity and commonality in the medians, I found there to be information in the number sense because it demonstrated where the opinions varied. The two

Table 6

Students of public school response to what the elementary school provided

	1	2	3	4	5	Median
Knowledge of technology use	-	-	2	3	-	4
Physical education training	-	-	1	2	2	4
Effective reading and writing lessons	-	-	1	4	-	4
The math skills I needed	-	-	1	4	-	4
The opportunity to learn about the world	-	-	1	3	1	4
First Nation's culture and history	-	-	3	2	-	3

Note. Responses are made on a five-point scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree. Burgess, 2017) (n=5)

most interesting examples were the ranges to the statements *the elementary school provided effective reading and writing lessons* and *the elementary school provided the opportunity to learn about the world*. In the first case, they each had a median of 4, however there appears much more to this when observing the range and outliers. The parents of the public school had 100% agreed to the statement, while the band-operated parents responded with 63% agreed, 12% strongly agreed, but 25 % were undecided. This indicates a much different perspective than just taking the median into account.

The responses to the second statement of whether *the elementary school provided the opportunity to learn about the world* had medians of 4 for both sets of parents. Yet, the public-

Table 7

Parents of Band-operated school response to what the elementary school provided

	1	2	3	4	5	Median
Knowledge of technology use	-	-	3	5	-	4
Physical education training	1	-	1	6	-	4
Effective reading and writing lessons	-	-	2	5	1	4
The math skills he/she needed	-	-	2	5	1	4
The opportunity to learn about the world	1	-	2	5	-	4
First Nation's culture and history	-	-	4	2	2	3

Note. Responses are made on a five-point scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree. Burgess, 2017) (n=8)

school parents had 50% agreed, 33% strongly agreed, and 17% undecided. These were very different values when compared the band-operated parents results of 63% agree, 25 % were undecided, and 12% strongly disagreed. From this I could relate to my research that from the parent's point of view, there appeared to be a more positive impact on this topic at the public school and that the band-operated school could improve in this category.

By bringing the student data into this comparison made the analysis of this particular statement even richer. Again, all medians were 4, but the public-school student's responses were 60% agreed, 20% strongly agreed, and 20% undecided. In the band-operated student responses, 29% agreed, 29% strongly agreed, 13% were undecided and 29% disagreed. This data had much more of an impression on me than the medians. It was clear that there was a greater variance in

Table 8

Parents of public school response to what the elementary school provided

	1	2	3	4	5	Median
Knowledge of technology use	-	-	1	3	2	4
Physical education training	-	-	1	1	4	5
Effective reading and writing lessons	-	-	-	6	-	4
The math skills he/she needed	-	-	1	5	-	4
The opportunity to learn about the world	-	-	1	3	2	4
First Nation's culture and history	-	-	1	4	1	4

Note. Responses are made on a five-point scale rating (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = undecided, 5 = strongly agree. Burgess, 2017)
(n=6)

responses for the band-operated students, and in fact, a negative impact on the student's education in almost 30% of the cases.

Summary. The preceding part of this chapter, provided the data that was collected in the questionnaires, and displayed all the results in graph form. The first questionnaire was in response to *how they felt about the school*. These data were represented in Tables 1-4 and included responses that fell under the themes of *pride/confidence*, and *appropriate learning and academics*. These responses all showed a consistently agreeable impact for parents and students of both schooling systems. The median for these questionnaires were generally 4 (agree), with some notable exceptions. Students of the band-operated school had a median of 3 (undecided) for the statement *I was being prepared for high school*, and students of the public schools had a median of 3 (undecided) for the statements that they *felt connected to the students and staff* and

of feeling *proud of where I was*. The public school's students also had a median of 5 (strongly agree) to the statement *there were difficult subjects*.

The parent's responses were also predominantly a median of 4. The two exceptions were to the statement *there were difficult subjects*, which the band-operated school parent's median was 3.5 and to the statement *learning was important*, public school's parents had a median of 4.5.

Qualitative Research Findings

The next part to be explained in this research is the results that were obtained through the qualitative method. The qualitative nature in this portion of my research was fundamentally important. Lien, Pualeen, Kuo and Wang (2012), pointed out that input from participants is valuable and necessary. The objective voice from community members who shared similar experiences was crucial. Hearing the stories helped me understand the motivation behind participant beliefs in education.

The data collected in this portion of the research included three individual interviews with parents (two female and one male) of the public-school system, three individual interviews with parents (one female and two male) of the band-operated school system, one individual interview with one student (female) and a focus group discussion with two students (male) from the public-school system, and one focus group discussion with three students (two female and one male) from the band-operated school system.

Throughout my analysis, I continually related participant responses to topics that were prominent in the literature review. The basis of all analysis were my research questions: To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the

community in a public elementary school? What might be the effects of elementary school experiences that influence the high school successes of children from the community? Is one school system impacting the students more positively than the other? How is it more positively impacting the children, or what might be taking place at this facility that is making it more effective in student achievement? I was able to expose some of the repetitive concepts that presented themselves and resolved there to be six integral aspects in the elementary education of First Nations children. These themes are presented in Table 9, and then I will continue detailing the significance of each of these.

When all the qualitative data had been transcribed from the recorded device into a Microsoft Word document, I then had the task of reading and re-reading all content. I highlighted, circled, underlined and made notes all relating to the themes that were presenting themselves. The six most relevant themes produced were: family, pride/confidence, appropriate learning and academics, local connections and conveniences, inter-racial relations, and traditional and cultural skills and values. From these themes, I could deduce features that related to my research question.

The idea of *family* was meant to refer to any capacity in which a family member impacted the education of the student, or was interpreted as a role model. One case of this theme was noted in a questionnaire response from a public-school parent who wrote, “if he missed the bus after school he could walk to my work.” The student had a parent working in the town and having this parent point out the positivity of being proximally located was coded as family. The next most significant theme was *pride/confidence*. This was recognized in a statement by a student from the public school, who claimed that he just got along with everybody. This comment allowed for me to interpret that the student was proud of who he was and had the

Table 9

Theme and frequency from questionnaire comments, individual interviews and focus group discussions (Burgess, 2017).

Theme	Frequency
Family	72
Pride/Confidence	57
Appropriate learning and academics	56
Local connections and conveniences	42
Inter-racial relationships	35
Traditional/cultural values and skills	28

confidence to be in good relations with all the people who impacted his elementary school experiences. *Appropriate learning and academics* was a theme that was prominent in this research content and was clearly recognized in comments such as “There wasn’t much teaching with math and other people’s history” and “It was very difficult for me in high school not knowing the least bit about it (math).” These statements demonstrated that this student in particular was feeling a negative impact regarding her level of learning and academics. Another theme that was prominent was *local connections and conveniences*. When a band-operated parent said that they appreciated having their child close to home and connected to the community, it was coded as having a positive impact on local connections/conveniences. Yet, comments from public school parents validated a negative impact on their children’s elementary school experience when making comments such as “It’s too far away. That bus run was brutal” and “The dark, cold bus ride in the morning”. *Inter-racial relationships* were deemed the next most frequent theme and could be noted in comments by public school parents such as “...you

don't have to like the people but you got to learn to live with them and get along with them.”

This was one of the positive impacts of leaving the community to attend an elementary school in the public system in town. Conversely, a negative impact for staying in the community to attend the band-operated school was stated by a band-operated parent “Related to everyone in his class would like him to have other friends.” Obviously, some themes were showing the positive and the negative impacts related to the choice of schooling system. The final theme that arose in the qualitative data was *traditional/cultural values and skills*. This theme was coded from statements such as, “involve elders!”, “LEARN OUR LANGUAGE”, and “I think they did the best with what they had concerning First Nations history.” These three comments were directly related to the theme of traditional and cultural skills/values.

Family. First Nations culture is recognized as being from a sense of place for countless generations and the concept of family continues to play a universal role in the development of children from the community (Bell, 2004). Looking at the concept of family in this First Nation community became increasingly dominant in the responses and was clearly worth recognizing. The impact of the family in this community is demonstrated even in this research. Interestingly, children are raised by families that are not always their birth parents. Examples that I found of this being the case included one parent who was raised by his grandparents and was under the impression that his mother was his big sister until he became a teenager and the truth was disclosed to him. All other parent interviewees were raised in two parent households, except one. One parent was actually a foster parent, and while another was the biological parent of one of the students included in this data, there were two younger foster children being raised in that household.

The student interviewees had relations that spanned all roles of family also. Of the children interviewed, they came from families of three siblings in three of the instances, four siblings in one of the cases, and five siblings in the other two cases. The two females in the band-operated discussion group were cousins, and one of these females in this group was cousins with one of the males in the public-school discussion group. The two males in the public-school discussion group were also cousins. These familial relations have common presence and pretence in the lives of those who grow up surrounded by recognizable family members. They see each other in their clan settings and in the feast hall. They recognize who is related to them throughout the community and spend time nourishing the spirit of family.

The roles and different capacities that are held by all community members was supported in this research. One parent interviewee from the band-operated system had a young child in the pre-school program. The child would explain to the parent how much she loved her teacher, and although it was her auntie, the child repeatedly said that she was to call the auntie/teacher by her name and not auntie. Therefore, it was evident that as children spend time with their extended family in a variety of social settings, they become cognizant of the many positions and responsibilities that the family encompasses.

Interviewees in both the parent and student groups talked about Uncles who took children to the exercise place, Aunties, Grandma's, and a father who worked on the staff in the schools, the impacts of a strong, positive role model in the household, as well as the effects of having a negative role model in the household. I noted throughout the coding stage of data analysis, that these aspects of family came up again and again. Interviewees talked about how a family member did something or other in a way that clearly fostered memories and allowed me to view the influence that family had on individuals, and the community as a whole.

When expressing a concern for the past, the instances reported of residential school trauma was overwhelming too. One parent referred to herself as “the daughter of a residential school survivor.” Another told me of specific situations that he experienced in the residential school and the affect this had upon him, his family and sibling relations, and his social development. Even the student interviewees had information about family members living with the repercussions of residential schools. One student stated that her grandfather will “...only bring up little bits and parts of it, but he’s got to be highly intoxicated for that to happen.” The point of this is not to investigate the residential schools as such, rather, that families have this strong connection to each other and to the past. Residential schools will be further discussed in the traditional/cultural values and skills.

One of the key responses from the interviews and focus group discussions, was regarding support that parents provide and how they can help in promoting success at school. When I posed the question about what the role is for parents in a child’s education, all respondents were firmly of the opinion that family plays a central role. From being positive role models through an attainment of successful education for themselves, to being a supportive and involved parent in the child’s education, there was complete agreement among participants that parental support is vital for children to be successful in school.

Comments from the parent interviews add support to the impact of family and what the role of a parent should be in their child’s education. Firstly, a band-operated parent said “I always tell kids the same. Finish your education. I check in on them everyday after school.” Secondly, a public parent stated that, “they need to be 100% involved.” As well, in the band-operated student focus group, one participant stated “keeping up with your kids, fighting for them, giving them the best that they can get.” Another comment from this discussion included a

suggestion that parent's involvement could be part of the concern for those students who are unsuccessful in school. A band-operated student claimed, "it's partially the parents fault...some are not supportive, not too involved."

A final note about the theme of family that was prominent in my research related to the inter-racial theme as well as the local connections and conveniences theme. A parent pointed out on a questionnaire statement that he felt his child was better off in the public school because the student would be related to all the other students, if he had attended the band-operated school. While this kind of feeling shows that direct family connections could have a negative impact on the student's development, I will further discuss this idea in the inter-racial, and local connections and conveniences section of this chapter.

There is no doubt that family plays a fundamental role in the development of the child. First Nations structure of family and the depth of meaning behind thousands of years and numerous generations, portray family from a unique vantage point. Family is central to First Nations way of being and is also poignant in the successful attainment of education. A supportive family will ease the burden of difficulty in school and help guide children in completing their education. In the cases of the band-operated school and the public-school, family had a significant impact on how positive the children felt about school.

Pride/Confidence. The theme that was coded the next most frequently was pride/confidence. How First Nations students feel about themselves and their own development in any number of situations, is another factor in the positively they are going to feel about education and their potential for attaining a high degree of fulfillment from school. This theme could have been coded in a number of different ways, such as self-esteem or self-respect, but I

felt pride and confidence better reflected the ability for students to have these qualities which could be shaped from the elementary schooling system they attended.

Feeling proud and having confidence linked well with the other themes. For example, having a strong sense of community, and coming from a caring family can help to instill pride and confidence. Positive role models can support the development of pride and confidence in children. As well, pride and confidence can build stronger local connections, and guide improved inter-racial relations. A First Nations student with an understanding of traditional and cultural values and skills will also have the ability to express themselves in a proud and confident manner. The opposite can also be recognized in debilitating the feeling of pride and confidence. Negative role models, loss of culture, a lack of connection to community will all foster an inadequate ability to feel pride and confidence in oneself. Therefore, this theme of being proud/confident was important to show how the children could have been impacted by the elementary school system that they attended.

There were different ways in which pride and confidence were exhibited in the research. The initial sense of pride/confidence were examples from the student populations from both school systems, and their feelings about being a First Nation person. When explaining how being a First Nation person supported their personal belief system or how they viewed the world, one student from the band-operated system claimed that “I was a little embarrassed growing up and I wanted to leave this place. I hated this place, hated the people.” This statement exemplifies a child who was not proud nor confident. However, she went on to say, “As I got older, I started embracing it, like hearing our grandparents speak the language. I’m more culturally involved now and the feast system and I’d like to learn my language.” The changing attitude of this student shows that she had become increasingly proud of her heritage, and this

sense of pride coincides with her feeling more confident. There will be more discussion on the specific theme of culture and traditions later in this chapter, but there is a distinct connection between the themes pride/confidence, and cultural and traditional skills/values.

Another example of how the theme of pride/confidence was prominent in this research were examples of being proud of oneself. As an individual, performing actions which raise the opinion of that person are like a self-fulfilling sense of accomplishment. Feeling good about one's actions is going to build their sense of pride and confidence. In an interview with a parent, this was ably demonstrated. He had raised his own children and was also raising other members of the family who were not his own children. "A lot of other kids were born and came through this household and I left an impression on all of them." In stating this, the participant is explaining that he is proud of what he had done for the various children who had grown up in his care. He thought of himself as a good role model and was confident that he was doing his best for all these children. These actions, in turn, made him feel, and express himself, with pride.

As far as a student concept of self-directed pride, there were examples of how children recognized their own developments and traits. In one of the cases, a student from the public-school system stated that "I think my accomplishments reflect on myself and I think I am doing pretty good. It's a lot of commitment to things and my own career path that I want to take." This student had expressed that she was confident of what she has been able to accomplish up to this point.

A further degree of pride and confidence was from the viewpoint of parent towards child. Again, the blending of themes was prominent in this research. The commonality of the theme family and the theme pride/confidence take some parallel points. However, the pride/confidence

theme is strictly based on the specific feelings of the parent being proud and confident in the student and their development.

One example of the parent expressing pride in their child was explained by a parent who stated, “I take a great interest in the kids that are in this house.” As well, this parent expressed that his foster daughter had improved her attendance and this made him feel “really pleased with that, it makes me happy.” Another parent was describing her child as “a leader in the classroom, he adjusts really well, and he is a very, very confident kid.” These two parent interview statements, provided further evidence of pride.

The effects of pride in the sense of schooling is a theme that is encompassed by reciprocity. Either of the school systems in question can provide an environment to enrich and support the confidence of a student. In the case of my research it was found that children can be proud of their culture and traditions, their family, and their own successes. The quality of being confident arises from learning appropriate academics, having positive inter-racial relationships, and increased connections and conveniences at the local level. The themes that I coded in the participant data linked together and supported each other. Pride and confidence was one of the ensuing qualities that was expressed by participants in the interview and discussion group responses.

Appropriate learning and academics. The learning that takes place in the elementary school setting is intended to build a foundation for successful transition into high school and a greater role within the structure of society. Mistakes of the past and lessons learned from failed educational experiments should help support Aboriginal learners in the present. In a purely academic realm, Aboriginal students require the same quality of instruction as their non-Native peers. Whether students of the public-school system or the band-operated system, the impact

upon students must allow them with the best possible instruction to develop their scholastic capabilities.

This research found that the impact upon First Nation children varied, with regards to the competency of academics. There were many reports from participants that claimed the level of academics must be improved in the band-operated school. These claims came from parents and students from both the band-operated school system and the public-school system.

As with other themes that connected to each other, the theme of appropriate academics and learning is deeply related to the theme of pride/confidence. Learning the required curriculum content and being proficient in the academic knowledge taught in school will provide a student with more confidence and more pride as they progress through their educational careers. The concepts that a child attains at the elementary school should empower them to move into the high school level without a great deal of difficulty. The more challenging the transition, the less likely the student will persevere and have success.

In my research, the appropriateness of academic achievement at the elementary level came up often. It was pointed out in a number of cases that high quality academic instruction was lacking at the band-operated school. Comments from the band-operated students such as, “we never learned any math here” and “we didn’t do much science” were indicators of specific subject and curriculum material that the students felt was not being adequately taught.

The notion that the level of academic instruction was sub-par at the band-operated school was echoed by the public-school students. One of the students stated outright that her father would not allow her to attend the band-operated school because “this school was not a good education”, while the other students from the public school also recognized appropriate

academics as having a negative impact for the children who attended the band-operated school. Statements from parents of both systems suggested the same, as a band-operated parent claimed “they should bring up the academics a little more here”, while a comment from a public-school parent suggested that children from the band-operated school are usually two years below grade level.

The academic achievement levels for the students at the band-operated school was not entirely negative though. Support was noted to be available at the band-operated school as one parent claimed that her son “is learning lots and the teachers at the elementary school are doing an excellent job.” Evidence came up in several of the interviews that smaller class sizes and one-on-one assistance was often utilized for students who required extra guidance. These students did receive further instruction that was needed to increase learning capacity.

There were participants who suggested that perceptions about appropriate academics were untrue and unfounded. One of the parents from the public- school system recognized that all children are different and that it would “depend on the child on where their situation is best for them.” This rational was repeated by another parent as she recognized that some children learn better with different techniques and the difference of the child was a better comparative element than comparison of school. Although the learning that students had accomplished in the two schooling systems was deemed to be of a dissimilar quality, families noted some positivity in each system. Overall, however, the band-operated school did have a higher degree of unsatisfactory academic achievement.

Local connections and conveniences. The location of the schools in relation to the community, and the impact of proximity, was an issue represented by the theme of local conveniences and connections. The topics that were coded within this theme provided aspects of

positivity, while there were also concerns of negative influence upon the elementary education of the children. Conveniences and connections are enabling factors for a successful education and can help to build upon the theme of pride and confidence. Again, the themes in my research were continually melding together and were recognized as existing within a spectrum of commonality.

The first notable convenience that participants spoke about, was of the band-operated children being close to home and close to the parents. Having the opportunity to attend the elementary school in the community and not having to commute, was seen as a key premise to why families choose one school system over another. Children from the community travel mere minutes to the band-operated school, as compared to an approximately forty-five minute bus ride to the public schools in the town. Statements of parent participants from the band-operated school that supported the notion of convenience included, “our kids are lucky, they just have to go a few little steps down to the school.” Another parent commented that “its local and the kids don’t have to get up early.” As for the student responses that supported this theme, one mentioned that being able to ride a bike to school was advantageous as well as “having friends right here after school is really convenient.” This difference in location was recognized as having an impact on the elementary education of the children.

Some of the comments from public school participants were expressive of the negative impact of the travel and distance for the child’s elementary school experience. One public parent stated “I worried about them travelling in the winter”, and another parent recognized the same issue when stating “that bus run was brutal.” The longer day and further travel was noted by one of the public-school students as being “hard when we were younger”. However, the other two public-school students claimed that the travel did not bother them. Proximity to their child was a

reason for sending the child to the public school in town in one instance. The parent travelled to the town for work each day and felt it best that the student was also in one of the public schools in town to be close to each other. Overall, location was an important factor in choosing what school to attend. However, other conveniences came up that fell within the framework of the local connections and conveniences theme.

The band-operated school was responsible for providing some services that the public school did not and these were noted as being positive components of the band-operated school. In order to promote healthier children, the dentist would regularly visit for check-ups and teeth cleaning. One of the band-operated students claimed that were it not for this opportunity to be seen by the dentist, there would not have been any other occasion. The other instance of a service that was beneficial and convenient was the breakfast and hot lunch program offered at the band-operated school. Meals for the children was seen as extremely advantageous to the band-school operated students, and supported the notion that there was a higher degree of convenience here. The meal program was mentioned by all ranges of the participants. Parents and students of both schooling system saw the meal programs as significant and positive in the lives of the students.

Another analysis of the local connections and conveniences theme was the idea of being in the educational setting with so many familiar friends and family. There was not one side of the argument outweighing the other side, but some participants reflected that it was beneficial to be among family member and lifelong friends, while others stated it as more of a drawback. The idea of connectedness to staff and students is further explored in the next theme, inter-racial relationships. Yet, the convenience of being around familiar people was a recognizable feature.

Building a strong, peer connection with other community members was seen as having a positive impact, as one band-operated student said, “I had more confidence being with my childhood friends”, and a band-operated parent told me “the kids, being local, grew up with all their friends.” Another parent recognized that some students might struggle outside a more familiar surrounding and they felt that the increased comfort would increase success.

A final convenience that impacted the students of the band-operated school was mentioned by a parent participant in regards to school supplies. The band-operated school generally provided all the supplies for the students and this financial burden alleviated some of the onus that would be on the families themselves.

Overall, the theme of local connections and conveniences ran strong with the band-operated students and was one of the more positive impacts for the children and their educational capabilities. It was a prominent theme with community members who felt it was best to educate the children at the local level. However, those families that thought it best to educate the children outside the community, felt that local connections and conveniences were overshadowed by the following theme of inter-racial relationships.

Inter-racial relationships. While the previous theme proved a positive support for the band-operated school impact upon students, the theme of inter-racial relationships was the driving premise that supported a positive impact upon the students of the public-school system. Commuting to one of the public schools in town, was seen as immensely valuable to the children in order to meet new peers and make connections from outside the community.

In the both of the student focus groups, it was suggested as advantageous to have a larger cohort in order to ease the transition into high school. Students from the band-operated school

and the public school claimed that having attended a public school in the town allowed for greater access to age-related peers and these connections made their elementary school experience all the more positive. This was especially the case as children moved into the more populated setting of high school.

The transition from grade seven to grade eight is the change from elementary school to secondary school, and there was acknowledgement that children who had attended public school benefitted the most. One comment that came from the public-school students focus group on explaining a disadvantage for attending the band-operated school suggested “when kids come from the band-operated school they have a harder time adjusting in the high school because they don’t know anyone.” Another statement along this thought pattern was that attending one of the public schools in town allowed the student to “get to know a lot more people”.

The idea that inter-racial relationships better supported the students from the public schools was also voiced by the band-operated students. While the band-operated school was recognized for providing a smaller, more intimate setting, this also meant there were challenges to become socially comfortable in the high school. Band-operated students used words such as “intimidated”, “feeling not as good as them”, and “didn’t know many people” to describe their lack of inter-racial relationships.

There was no real mention from band-operated parents on this theme, but it was a heavily weighted concept for having a positive impact on the education of the public-school children. Parents who had children from an elementary school in the public system expressed the positivity of being in a mixed-race setting. Comments such as “mingling with others”, “try to get along with them”, and “get out into the mainstream society” re-iterated the feeling that meeting and learning with children of other cultures was a benefit to attending a public school. This

theme and the participant comments attribute to the fact that being in a mixed culture or multi-culture school afforded a better social opportunity for success.

The theme of inter-racial relationships was viewed in more than just a student to student basis. The connections that developed through student to teacher interactions also exemplified having a positive impact upon the children, regardless of race. While there is research supporting the notion that First Nations children can benefit from having First Nations role models as educators (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009), there was not one participant in my research that claimed to recognize the race of a teacher as a significant factor in their elementary school experience. When asked to discuss a teacher who made a positive impact on their learning in elementary school, most of the students described a teacher that was non-Native. In one case, a band-school student reported of a high school teacher that she was excited to finally get into the class and she stated, “he was non-Native and he was tonnes of fun”.

One of the interview and focus group questions that I posed to participants, ran along this theme of inter-racial relationships and questioned whether it made a difference if the teacher was Native or non-Native. In every case, parents and students alike, the responses were that it did not matter. One parent response was “education is education. It doesn’t matter,” while another commented, “I’ve never had an issue with my kids being taught by First Nations or non-First Nations”. That being said, the comparison may have been difficult to ascertain, as there were some of the public-school students who had only had non-Native teachers. Were they to have had experience with a Native teacher, these results may have been different.

Traditional/Cultural values and skills. As much as the previous theme explained the positivity of student development in circumstances that included many cultures, the theme of traditional/cultural values and skills laid the foundation for a level of positivity that supported a

more locally based impact. This theme is rooted in thousands, if not tens of thousands, of years of history. First Nations history is a history of struggle, survival, perseverance and revival. For children to know the true past of their ancestry and how their culture had once thrived, then became destructively colonized and is presently becoming more prominently accepted, shows a determination that strengthens the values of that culture.

Language and culture were recognized as important developmental competencies for these First Nation children. In this research, it was stated by participants that knowing more about traditional skills and values built pride and confidence and allowed for a more rounded understanding of the history of their Nation.

Although the residential school experience is not a traditional value or skill per se, the generations that had to suffer this forced educational institutionalization has spawned impacts lasting into the culture and traditions of today. The residential school experience was not intended to be the core of this research, but in the interviewing stage, it quickly became obvious that there was a profound impact upon the cultural values of First Nation's people because of the residential school era. The horrors cannot be denied. When a parent from the public school described his time in the residential school and stated "They should never have nuns in a school. You've never met a nastier pack of bitches", this clearly demonstrated that the negative experience has not abated from this participant's memory.

In other instances, I noted some parent participants referring to their own parents as "residential school survivors" and another participant explained "because of residential schools and the impact of that, I never got to learn that. They (the parents) had so much knowledge, they just never talked about it." Residential school impacts were not only recognized in parent participants, students in the band-operated school focus group brought up this discussion also. It

was specifically explained by one of the students with a grandfather that lived through the residential school experience. She stated, “there are still people hurting from it. To this day he can’t talk about it.” With a horrendous historical impact that still haunts Aboriginal people today, the role of the present educational system should be to build on the understanding of trauma and engage learners with the true history of colonization.

The key traditional skills that were expressed in the interviews included hunting and trapping, and use or revitalization of “First Languages”. The cultural value that was most recognized in the interviews was respecting and learning from elders. When considering what the theme of traditional/cultural values and skills revolves around, these aforementioned factors are distinct. A parent of the band-operated school pointed out that more should be done by schools of either the public or band-operated system. “They should be able to bring in some hunters and trappers and teach that stuff as well. Not just the language. There’s a lot of other hunters and trappers out there that could pass it on.” Experiential learning from community members with expertise in the outdoors, would certainly increase student understanding of hunting and trapping. This component of learning feeds into the next important aspect of the theme of *traditional/cultural values and skills*.

Respecting and learning from elders is a traditional and cultural value rooted in First Nations ways of being (Bell, 2004). This structure of support and guidance with inter-generational cooperation was expressed on many occasions in the interviews and focus group discussions. One band-operated student stated that improved cultural awareness must be learned through exchanges with elders. As well, when talk of revitalizing the “First Language” came up, it was always described as the responsibility of an elder to be involved in this process.

In terms of what the schools provided with the theme of traditional/cultural skills and values, there was clear evidence that more could be included in both the band-operated school and the public schools. The local First Nation culture was somewhat more prominent in the band-operated school and was also noted as one of the more advantageous factors of the band-operated school. However, all student participants in both groups indicated a desire to have increased learning about history from a First Nations perspective. The “First Language” was also expressed as important to revive. Although the children from the band-operated school discussed having some linguistic understanding, they wished it was to a higher degree. “First Language” learning was not evident in the interviews from public school participants, and was not deemed as integral to their educational capacity as it was from the band-operated participants.

Chapter Summary

The data collected in this research included quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data included responses to a Likert scale questionnaire and this data compared the medians, ranges and outliers of families that attended either the band-operated school or a public school outside the community. Many median scores were similar across the comparisons, yet range and outliers provided for insightful observations. The two topics of the questionnaires depicted firstly, what the elementary school provided, and centred around the themes of *appropriate learning and academics* and *traditional/cultural values and skills*. Secondly, responses were based on how participants felt about the school, and the themes of, *inter-racial relationships, local connections and conveniences, and pride/confidence*. While there was a more positive impact among the public-school responses for appropriate learning and academics,

and inter-racial relationships, the band-operated school impacted more positively in the themes of local connections and conveniences, as well as traditional/cultural values and skills.

Qualitative data was collected from parents of the band-operated school and the public schools through individual interviews with three participants from each school system. As well, student input was gathered during discussion groups from each school system. There were three students involved in each discussion group, although the public-school discussion group consisted of one individual interview and a focus group of two because of scheduling challenges. The goal of these interviews and focus groups was to further understand the research question, *To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the community in a public elementary school?*. As well, I sought further understanding of the following questions; what might be the effects of elementary school experiences that influence the high school successes of children from the community?; Is one school system impacting the students more positively than the other?; How is it more positively impacting the children, or what might be taking place at this facility that is making it more effective in student achievement? Among participant data, the six themes that emerged were *family*, *pride/confidence*, *appropriate learning and academics*, *local connections and conveniences*, *inter-racial relationships*, and *traditional/cultural values and skills*. These themes are represented in Table 9, in order from most frequent to least frequent.

The first theme was *family*, and within this theme were the ideas of having family members working in the same setting as students, as well as how family members supported the students through their elementary schooling years. The influence of family was recognized as an important factor for having a successful educational experience.

The next theme was *pride/confidence*, and was displayed when participants noted feeling positive or negative about some aspect of the elementary school experience. Pride and confidence was lacking, especially with students who felt they lacked academic ability. However, this theme was a positive component regarding relationships with peers. One other example of this theme that had positive and negative ramifications, emerged when discussing their heritage and community.

Appropriate learning and academics was the third theme to become prominent. There was a sense that the band-operated school could improve the quality of education and that students need to be achieving a higher caliber of learning. This was voiced by all participants, although there were suggestions that the band-operated school was effective in providing an adequate level of education.

I next described the relevance of *local connections and conveniences*, which applied to some of the beneficial traits of remaining in the community for elementary school. One of the aspects relevant to this theme included, being so close to home and not being required to travel a considerable distance. Also noted as a convenience were the breakfast and hot lunch programs at the band-operated school, health support, and being provided with school supplies. The other important part of the local connections was recognized in being raised in a tight-knit and cohesive peer group of community members.

Inter-racial relationships were noted as a major reason for children to attend one of the public schools, and also as a key contributor to having an easier transition into the high school. This theme provided strong evidence for supporting the positive impact upon children from the community who had been educated in a multi-cultural setting. Blending in among the general populace was viewed as advantageous for children who attended one of the public schools.

The final theme in this research was *traditional/cultural values and skills*. The level of instruction for traditional and cultural skills was recognized as an important element of the band-operated school. Yet, participants suggested that there was still more that could be done to improve the skills and values in order to facilitate an effective cultural program in both the public and band-operated school. The traumatic impact of residential schools continues to plague community members and was recognized as historical episode that had a great effect on the culture of the community.

The next chapter will further evaluate the findings from this chapter. The impacts of both schooling systems were recognized in the relative terms of my research question. Further investigation of the data helped to authenticate the factors that negatively or positively influenced the children of this community through their elementary schooling experiences.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In the first chapter of this thesis, I detailed the rationale and reasoning behind my choice for completing this research. In the second chapter I presented the literature review, which examined many of the issues central to the overarching concept of Aboriginal Education. In the third chapter, I reviewed the methods, designs, and philosophical foundations that guided the research, as well as the quantitative and qualitative relevance, and the specific format of the research. In Chapter 4, I provided a description of the data, as well as recognizing the role of both the quantitative and qualitative results in the research.

In this fifth chapter, I will discuss the findings from the data collection. I will review the analysis of quantitative data from the questionnaire, followed by an in-depth exploration of the qualitative data from the focus group discussions and individual interviews. Details of the discussion were driven by the research question that investigated the impact upon First Nation children who attended public schools and who attended a band-operated school.

Study Findings

There are a number of factors that positively influence First Nations learners. Fine (2007) suggested that a supportive and direction-oriented family is integral to educational success, while Bell et al (2004) re-affirmed the need to effectively track student achievement in order to facilitate the highest standard of differentiated instruction. An encouraging family and a school that provides high caliber learning are essential pieces for increasing educational attainment rates for First Nations students.

Triador et al (2015) described the benefits for First Nations children who participated in a healthy snack program through the school. With obesity and type 2 diabetes rates that are much higher for on-reserve children than off-reserve children, an improved diet would improve overall

health and well-being for children. Antone (2003), Brant-James and Renville (2012), and Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998) made the recommendation for cultural programming to be central in the school atmosphere. All of these reports rationalized that cultural and traditional methodology can improve the school as an institutional entity, as well as to enhance the whole community perspective.

Hyslop (2011) detailed the need for Aboriginal children to be proudly identifying as First Nations, but there was also the recognition that children must grow to be successful beyond the community platform. Students must be taught the skills to be successful in the multi-cultural world we live in. When all of these aforementioned tactics are taking place, a sense of pride and confidence will ensue. A positive development in these areas should translate into higher graduation rates and better achievement scores for First Nations students.

In my research, I gathered quantitative data through questionnaires and qualitative data through interviews and focus group discussions, in order to best evaluate the impacts on children who had attended different elementary school systems. It is worth noting that opinions of parents and students of the same school system were often quite different. As well, the responses from the students of both school systems were at odds with each other and parents of both systems were also dissimilar. While some ideas remained constant throughout the research, it became obvious that the ideas of all participants had some specific variances.

The themes that came into prominence and held significance within the scope of Aboriginal Education included *family, pride/confidence, appropriate learning and academics, local connections and conveniences, inter-racial relationships, and traditional/cultural values and skills*. The data sets initialized the preceding themes and allowed for me to conclude that the impact upon First Nation students who had attended a band-operated school, and those who had

attended one of the public schools, was an overall positive experience (Hyslop, 2011). A more thorough investigation found variances that did reflect in some participants a more negative feeling, and ultimately, I was able to decipher what each school system provided effectively and what aspects required further improvement.

Family. Hare and Pidgeon (2004) and Bell et al. (2004) described the level of support from the family as having a direct correlation on the educational attitudes and accomplishments of students. When students recognize that their family is supportive and involved in the educational process, there is generally a more positive outcome. Similar to Hare and Pidgeon (2004)'s correlational finding, my data showed that family was a significant factor in the choice to attend the band-operated school or a public school. Often this decision was made by the parent because of their opinion, and the children were influenced by the families set of beliefs.

Mattson and Caffrey (2001) claimed that involvement in a child's education, and becoming part of the school community and decision-making committees, was a major role for family members to embrace. Not only does it give more Aboriginal voice to school procedures, children recognize the effort being put in by parents and come to see the value of education. In my own research, I found there was complete agreement to the claims put forth by Mattson and Caffrey (2001)'s concept of family playing a major role in education. I will first discuss the quantitative data from my research, then I will assess the qualitative data. All the while, the comparison between the public schools and the band-operated school will be described.

The only statement from the questionnaires that could be recognized within the theme of family was *connected to students and staff*. The data collected from the questionnaire showed that the median for both the sets of parents was 4, with regards to the feeling *connected to students and staff*. The only difference was that there were slightly more parents from the band-

operated school who were undecided. The student data was somewhat different, as all band-operated students replied agree, making a median of 4. This contrasted with the public-school students who replied as mostly undecided, although there was also one respondent that strongly agreed, making the median 3. From this, I could deduce that connecting to staff and students had the highest degree of an impact for the band-operated students, while it was the public-school students who were least impacted by this statement.

The idea that students felt more connected to staff and students would be viewed differently for those in the band-operated school compared to those from a public school, because in most of the cases family members were together daily in the band-operated school. The impact of *family* was not as great for the public-school participants as it was for the band-operated participants. In my qualitative data, many instances arose when a participant discussed family members who worked at the band-operated school. The interviews and focus group discussions shed light on students having family members in the school that included siblings, parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. These family members had such roles as classmates, support staff, cooks, secretaries, teachers, and custodial workers.

The dynamics of the band-operated school were unique because family was a noticeable component. Within the classroom, students were among peers that were connected by a much deeper relationship than just age-related cohorts. Cousins and siblings played significant roles in classes with each other, and this was not seen in the public schools. Staff at the band-operated school had an impact upon students, in regards to familial relations, as aunts, uncles and grandparents performed various roles as staff-members. Family was described by some participants as having an advantageous impact for children in the band-operated school, while others viewed it as a more negative influence and a reason for attending one of the public schools.

Students who attended the band-operated school viewed the family connections to school more favorably than students who attended a public school. A band-operated parent who had two children graduated from high school and two children still in the elementary school stated that the younger girl “loves that her brother is in the school.” Examination of comments from the qualitative data confirmed further feelings of family. One band-operated student claimed to have some challenges in making the differentiation between a member of the support staff who was her aunt. “Knowing them is a pro and a con. Having her here and having her be the T.A. and not my auntie was difficult.” The duties that family members performed in the school setting allowed for positive role modelling, yet, the adult was viewed in a less typical fashion than regular familial relations.

All participants, in all areas of my research, adamantly stated that family support was important for successful educational achievement. Children need to know that their family is there for them and a school/home relationship is absolutely necessary. Student comments consisted of “parents have to keep up with their kids and actually wanting the best for their kids” and “fighting for them and giving them the best they can get”. Parents claimed likewise that “a parent’s role is to check in on them (the student) everyday after school” and “we really had to fight for our son”. Positive examples of the school and home connection was voiced by a public-school parent who stated that teachers “had lots of meetings with me about his (the student’s) progress”.

From these assertions, it became obvious that the feeling of parental support and the benefits of family involvement would translate into a more positive impact in the educational attainment of First Nations children. There was no significant difference in the impact of family engagement in the child’s education when comparing the band-operated school and the public-

school system. However, an impact was detected for those children from the band-operated school in the theme of *family*. This impact was due largely to the staffing of family members in the band-operated school and the increased recognition of roles being performed.

In order for a positive home/school relationship to be successful, participants explained that schools must have an inviting, open door policy. Schools that work proactively with family will increase the pride and confidence that the family has for education. Regardless of being a public-school or band-operated school, family has a key role in developing proficient students and this leads into the next theme.

Pride/Confidence. A positive frame of mind supports the health and well-being of any person. This is equally true for First Nations children and their schooling. After generations of trauma and negativity that has been associated with education, Aboriginal Education is more important than ever. Mattson and Caffrey (2001) and Hyslop (2011) stated that escaping the cycle of poverty can be alleviated through higher levels of education. Students and parents alike, attested to the senses of pride and confidence to be elements that guided successful education. My data alluded to similar statements made by Hyslop (2011) that in order to attain higher levels of education takes a great deal of effort, and this effort can be more positively guided by an attitude that exudes pride and confidence.

This theme was represented in a variety of forms and I will firstly describe the elements in the questionnaire that participants felt proud and confident about. After that, I will discuss the issues that were brought forth during interviews and focus group discussion that elicited feelings of pride and confidence. Lastly, I will provide ideas for how a particular school system is capable of influencing these important attitudes.

The questionnaire focused on this theme with responses to the statement, *I was being prepared for high school* and *I felt proud of where I was*. Pride and confidence were noted in other questionnaire topics, but these topics were better suited for other themes. I found pride and confidence in the quantitative data represented in different ways. There was pride and confidence in one's own ability and being able to have a positive transition into high school was one way to demonstrate this. Another was feeling proud, or having confidence, in the institution that educated participants through the elementary years.

Although all participant data for the *being prepared for high school* response had a median of 4, parents of the public schools felt the most positive intrinsic impact and showed the most confidence in the ability for students to transition from elementary to secondary. When comparing these results to parents of the band-operated school there was a slightly lower level of confidence. Student responses demonstrated likewise that children who had attended a public school were more positively impacted than band-operated students. Band-operated students rated this response lowest of all participants, thus demonstrating, the level of pride and confidence was to a greater degree among the public-school participants.

The other questionnaire statement was an extrinsic response to being *proud of where I was*. This translated into having pride and confidence in the elementary school itself. This type of pride and confidence revealed a very different interpretation than the previous aspect of pride/confidence. In this case, students of the band-operated school had the most positive impact and students of the public school were much less impacted. The parents of the public school were more positive than the parents of the band-operated school. . This data set indicated that in terms of feeling good about the place or setting of learning, the majority of respondents felt proud of the elementary institution. The highest degree of pride was expressed from the public-

school parents and the band-operated students, while the lowest degree of pride was with the public-school students and the band-operated parents.

Reviewing the qualitative data further demonstrated why participants felt pride and confidence, and how the particular elementary school fostered this. Pride and confidence among the students was quite different than what the interpretation of the parents. With the student focus groups, pride and confidence expressed a more intrinsic, self-worth ideology. While with the parent interviews, pride and confidence were more extrinsic and the sense of pride and confidence was in how they felt about their child. The interviews and focus group discussions presented examples of pride and confidence, as well as recognizing a lack of pride and confidence in some cases.

When a parent was explaining about a time when their child was dealing with some issues about school and “he just didn’t feel comfortable”, it was clear that for whatever reason the child was without pride and confidence and his education was being negatively impacted. As this interview progressed, it was recognized that during the student’s high school years he had developed an increased amount of pride and confidence due to the positive support and involvement of his family. As he felt more pride and confidence, he improved his grades and his overall attitude towards school.

In another case, a parent also had a child that was struggling during a span of time in high school. The father began sitting in on his daughter’s classes to ensure that she was attending and participating. He explained that initially the daughter was embarrassed and did not have the confidence nor pride to be a successful student. She was “starting to fail” and the father was determined to do what he could to support his daughter. As the student began to realize her potential and acknowledged the family support, her pride and confidence increased to the point

that, “she pulled through and got top grades”. These two aforementioned situations demonstrate the relation to the first theme of family and the impact that family has upon pride and confidence of students. Another observation on these scenarios also indicated the pride and confidence that the parent can have for their child. The *pride/confidence* theme is closely linked to the *family* theme.

Another student who was in her graduating year exuded pride and confidence when discussing her accomplishments. She had done well throughout her elementary years and this continued through her high school years. She had a lofty goal of attending a post-secondary institute and to move into a career that she was passionate about. This participant saw herself with a bright future and had her sights on a direction that would further develop her skills. She anticipated what her life will look like when her schooling would be completed, and this showed that having a good opinion of herself and feeling confident was fostering her drive to carry on through school and into the workforce.

One final aspect of pride and confidence has to be mentioned in terms of being proud and confident as a First Nation person. In one of the student group discussions, a participant explained that growing up as a First Nation person caused her anguish and grief. As a child, she “wanted to leave this place. Hated the people, hated this place.” However, as she got older, she came to appreciate her culture and heritage much more. She had become “more culturally involved now and the feast system and I’d like to learn my language”. An important part of her claim was “to learn my language.” It was not the language of her community, her grandparents, it was her own language and she wanted to have more of it. A feeling of ownership resonated from her words and connected her to her First Nation culture. She was proud and confident of her heritage and wanted more from it.

These examples of pride and confidence show how First Nations students are better able to navigate education and society in general, and how family and cultural values play a significant role in their lives. However, a lack of pride and confidence can hinder the ability to attain a successful level of education. A student described her experience in high school as difficult because of “not having that confidence because people are bugging you.” She had challenges in the social setting of high school and that had an impact on her learning as she stated that during group work situations she would “just sit there and you’re not invited in the group. Even if you are put in one, they (other students) are just like, who are you?” Outside of the high school class setting though, this student “had more confidence being with my childhood friends.” This led me to understand that *pride/confidence* as a theme in my research was not only linked to *family* and *traditional/cultural skills and values*, but also to *appropriate learning and academics*, *local conveniences and connections* and *inter-racial relationships*.

Each of the school systems had the capacity to provide for the growth of pride and confidence. The public-school students developed pride and confidence as they were positively impacted from quality academic instruction and had the benefits of experiencing inter-racial relationships. The band-operated student’s pride/confidence was positively impacted by strengthened connections to the local community and a broader awareness of culture and traditions. Both of the school systems boosted pride/confidence in some capacities and could improve in other ways. Regardless of the school, teachers and schools can build on student individuality, and guide children to appreciate their own unique skills and talents. Aside from this, there must be assurance that First Nations children receive support for adequate social and academic progress. The confidence of being academically competent feeds into next theme.

Appropriate learning and academics. Possessing an age-appropriate level of education is a quality that is fostered by the previous two themes, but ultimately rests upon the school to provide for the students. With First Nations graduation and achievement results in need of improvement (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Mendelson, 2008; Richards, Vining & Weimer, 2010), schools are tasked with this challenge as the front line to ensure that success is achieved. Fine (2007) and Winzer (2008) recognized early intervention as an integral and timely process to ensure that students are learning the required content. Fine noted that when oral language and communication skills are lacking upon entering school in kindergarten, it made reading and writing all the more difficult to learn. The early years of education are formative at the primary level and throughout the elementary years success should be fostered to build competency and required knowledge.

In my own research, it was demonstrated that a lack of high quality academic learning did impact the students of the band-operated school. The perception was that children suffered when they entered high school, as they were not completely prepared for the level of instruction that came in the secondary schooling years. However, all of these participants had graduated, or were coming up to their graduating year, and other research would be required to confirm the findings of Mendelson (2008) and Richards, Vining, and Weimer (2010).

The questionnaire statements that fell within the *appropriate learning and academics* theme were rated on how well the elementary school provided *knowledge of technology use*, *effective reading and writing lessons*, and *the math skills I needed*. Responses demonstrated that among public school parents the results of the *effective reading and writing lessons* were the most agreeable. Meanwhile, the students of the public schools felt slightly more positively impacted than the students of the band-operated school. These results were not significantly

different, however, there was more discrepancy in *the math skills I needed*. The results in the math skills statement were reflected fairly positively among all the groups except for the band-operated school students. The band-operated students had by far the most negative results. From these findings, I learned that the band-operated students felt the need for more intensive instructional programming, especially in core mathematics.

Further supporting the need to ensure a high caliber of learning, was the statement *There were difficult subjects*. Vygotsky explained his theory of scaffolding, by which children need to build on their learning. As students learn one skill another can be developed. Vygotsky also described the zone of proximal development as necessary to adequately advance student knowledge. This theory stated that children learn best when content is neither too easy nor too difficult, and that each child will have a unique and individual learning platform (Pressley & McCormick, 2007). When children are being taught at the appropriate level, they are continually building on what they already know and increasing that ability is key to their developmental progress.

Students of the band-operated school did not feel this was the case. More than half the band-operated student respondents felt the course load was not difficult, while all the public-school student respondents felt the course load was difficult. The responses from parents of the public-school showed similar positivity toward the content which was in contrast with the band-operated parents. The responses to this statement spawned the greatest variance among participants. There was also strong uncertainty about appropriate learning and academics at the band-operated school that was voiced in the qualitative data.

There was a perception from participants at all levels that the learning at the band-operated school was not on par with the public schools. Students from the public schools

explained a lack of quality instruction as a key reason for choosing to attend a public school rather than be educated in the community, at the band-operated school. Generally, it was expressed that the parents had made this choice for the children, but the students made it clear that they agreed with this rationale and decision. The consensus was that better academics occurred in the public system.

The student participants from the band-operated school all felt that a higher level of academics was necessary as well. The feeling among this group was that they were not prepared for some of the core subjects and were at a disadvantage when they became high school students. In particular, one student stated that math and science were not taught to the degree that she thought they should be and that she struggled immensely in high school due to this. One comment supporting this was “I just didn’t know stuff, and I was made fun of for not knowing”, while another student claimed the band-operated school “was such a cakewalk here, getting into high school it was a harsh reality. It was tough.” This harsh reality is what the elementary school must be preparing students for and the quality of academics hindered a positive transition from the elementary to secondary level for the band-operated students.

Parents of the band-operated school were also blunt about the appropriate academics, and some statements expressed the desire to see more challenging content taught at the band-operated school. One parent stated “they should bring up the academics a little more, really push them (the students) to get higher. Most of the students who go to the high school have to adapt the first year to catch up on their education.” I found it interesting that the quality of education was being recognized as a drawback to the band-operated school, and that participants from all the categories expressed this. It showed that even though there was an element of dissatisfaction,

there was still enough desire to attend the band-operated school regardless of the perceived inadequacy of the academics.

The band-operated school was not without support though, as student participants recognized that they received extra support when there were learning difficulties. Feelings from parents suggested that some choices were made to attend a public school because of more “political” matters and that “people just haven’t done the research to find out the programs at the band-operated school”. In an interview with a band-operated parent, he described one of his son’s adamant refusal to accept the claim that appropriate academics and learning were compromised at all. “My son literally defends this school. He will defend it right up to the end. He said there is nothing wrong with the school. He went to University. He went right from kindergarten to Grade 7 and the year after he graduated, he was in University.” There were examples of a positive impact upon the academics for students from the band-operated school, however, the greater proportion of participants suggested that this was an area that required improvement.

The impact of appropriate learning and academics was recognized as a much better standard in the public school than the band-operated school. Quality instruction was a key reason for families to make the decision to send their child to the public schools in town. As well, the perception of the lower level of academics meant there was greater difficulty once students had entered high school and subject matter became all the more intense. All schools must ensure that First Nations children are receiving the best possible methods of education in order to attain the highest possible degree of academic achievement. Teachers and school leaders need to serve Aboriginal students with the most up to date instructional practices and maintain a high level of expectations. A school that provides differentiated instruction to

accommodate all learners, and meets all curriculum outcomes and expectations is essential for First Nations students to close the graduation gap. Ensuring that First Nations children are on par academically with their non-Native peers starts in the classroom, with as high a quality of education as possible.

Local connections and conveniences. The opportunity to build a sense of community can be empowering for individuals, especially those that have suffered under domination, colonialism and cultural genocide. Agbo (2012) claimed that having a supportive community can help to guide citizens out of troubled times. Hare and Pidgeon (2011) also emphasized the importance of community among First Nations youth and how community mindedness applied to their schooling. This theme of local connections and conveniences was an indicator of such a theory.

Local connections are also historical connections and in First Nations communities, these connections go back in time. The main quantitative evidence that would support this theme were responses to the questionnaire statement *I felt the school was safe and comfortable*. This data showed a favourable feeling in all cases, with the parents of the public school and students of the band-operated school expressing the most positive reactions. The least stable feeling was felt among the public-school students, and the most positively impacted were the band-operated students. This evidence supports the notion of community that was described by Hare and Pidgeon (2011). Locally based learning fosters the sense of community spirit and can build stronger relationships and connections.

In my research, the qualitative data demonstrated some interesting evidence on how connected a community can be. One fascinating fact that came to light with the parent interviews, was a mobility versus non-mobility factor of their own lives growing up. All the

parents who had children in the band-operated school had been raised their entire lives in the community, while those parents of the public-school children had either moved in and out of the community or moved to it at a later age. This demonstrated that the local connections figured prominently in the decision to educate their own children at the band-operated school.

One factor that positively impacted students of the band-operated school was the proximity of the school, which was centrally located within the community. This meant there was no commute and resulted in shorter days when compared to children who attended one of the public schools in town. The children travelling to the public schools had as much as an hour each way added to their day. The distance required to travel was expressed negatively in most cases. The capacity to remain in their home community was viewed as advantageous because children had more time in the day, were closer to family, and had the opportunity to develop a sense of kinship with others who have the same history of location.

The family members who commented to this idea of being close to home for the elementary school years explained their feelings with supportive comments such as “the kids are lucky. It is right in the community” and the term “it’s local” was stated on two different occasions when referring to an advantage of attending the band-operated school. The band-operated students also recognized that having the elementary school in the community allowed them to “hang out with their friends right after school”. Also stated by a band-operated student was “you don’t have to worry about rides back and forth all the time.” However, when this question was posed to the public-school students there was not a high degree of concern regarding travel. The commute had more of an impact on the parents of these children. Parents described travel as one of the major drawbacks for choosing a public elementary school. They

expressed that they worried when weather was inclement for travel, as well, parents found that the longer days could be challenging at times.

The other component to this theme was the convenience part, and meal programs were viewed by many as one of the most important programs that the band-operated school provided. The band-operated school offered a breakfast and hot lunch program that was used by all students. This was recognized as another advantage to attending the band-operated school. Band-operated parents made comments such as, “they get lunch and the nutrition in the lunches. Not every family has the money to pay for lunches” and “some kids don’t get the opportunity to have breakfast.” The band-operated students also all stated the meal programs as a reason that the band-operated school positively impacted them. Simply put, one student said, “You get fed”, and the other participants in the focus group discussion all voiced strong agreement about it.

A comment from a public-school parent also re-affirmed the benefits of the meal programs, as he stated “if it wasn’t for those things (lunch and breakfast), I don’t think a lot of kids would go to school.” This claim suggested that the meals given to the students of the band-operated school were essentially what drew children into the school. Getting them fed first, then allowed for them to do their schoolwork. The poverty that is pronounced on reserves can affect how and what a healthy diet would look like. By providing nourishing meals for the children of the band-operated school, there was a highly positive impact recognized here.

The *local connections and conveniences* theme had a more positive impact upon the band-operated students than the public-school students. The first factor that contributed was the proximity of the band-operated school made for easier access and shorter school days. The second factor was certain services such as dental check-ups, school supplies and the breakfast and lunch program. This theme was viewed as beneficial to the children of the band-operated

school and was in contrast with the next theme, *inter-racial relationships*, which was seen as a more valuable quality for attending a public school.

Inter-racial relationships. Working and learning with people from other cultures has become a common trait in our present society. People from all parts of the world are immersed in the various educational systems of this country, and there are notable differences among student populations in race, class, religion and language. Mendelson (2008) reported that native and non-Native people perceived a better quality of education occurred in the mainstream system. This is partially reflected in the *inter-racial relationships* theme. Although there were some challenges recognized by Atleo and Fitznor (2010) when it came to being a minority culture, they also described the benefits to all involved parties of a “cross-cultural” or “inter-cultural understanding” (21). As well, Richards and Vining (2004) explained the benefits of being in a multi-cultured class as compared to a mono-cultured class. They purported that inter-racial relationships are central to the goal of reconciliation and to build a more accepting society, children must be influenced by a variety of ethnicities and culturally unique peers. The evidence in my research demonstrated that the overwhelming reason for choosing to send the children to a public school was to give these students an experience with a wider variety of cultures.

This theme of inter-racial relationships was first recognized in the quantitative data. In responding to the statement, *I had the opportunity to learn about the world*, it was demonstrated that the public-school system participants were more positively affected. The results that I found in my research directly coincided with the evidence stated by Mendelson (2008), as a portion of community members just felt that the quality of education was better in the public schools. As well, clearly linked to the research by Richards and Vinings (2004), I found that my findings indicated that participants felt strongly that being in a multi-cultural setting of a public

school led to a more advantageous elementary experience. There was a much stronger agreement regarding inter-racial relationships among the public-school participants and this was further supported by the qualitative data.

In all of the public-school interviews and focus groups, *inter-racial relationships* were viewed as a positive impact for the children from the public schools. Parents from the band-operated school felt that the lack of inter-racial relationships was a drawback to attending the band-operated school, while parents of the public-school system claimed inter-racial relationships to be a significant factor in choosing to educate their children outside the community. One participant thought that “getting out in mainstream society instead of being stuck in that school up there (the band-operated school)” helped to shape his daughter’s personality. The inter-racial relationships better prepared her for the greater world and the parent stated “she got the bigger advantage because she learned how to associate with other people.” Inter-racial relationships helped to foster confidence and pride, as it gave these children a sense of the world off-reserve.

Growing up on-reserve has its challenges. These challenges often stem from drastically higher rates of poverty, and the social implications that come with lower socio-economic status (Richards & Vining, 2004; Aman, 2008). Experiencing what happens outside this setting can help promote a more rounded understanding of the world and society. A public-school student stated that he liked going to the public school “because I met many friends I would have never met otherwise” and a parent commented that they liked the public school as it gave their child the opportunity “to meet other children from different backgrounds.” As another parent put it, “inter-mingling” at the elementary school ages provided a better chance for success in high school and a career after high school. Although one parent felt that attending a public school

“disconnected him from our well-cultured community”, the overall impression was that inter-racial relationships impacted these children in a highly positive way.

Many of the comments regarding the lack of inter-racial relationships for band-operated students hinged on the challenges for these children when it came time to integrate into the high school. One parent commented that “being related to everyone in the class”, did not allow for a greater diversity of friends and may have hindered the child’s social skills. Having a larger cohort or group of peers was a supportive element of the transition into high school and many participants from both school systems stated that public school students had a clear advantage in this case. It was less intimidating and the shift from elementary to secondary school was smoother.

With regards to inter-racial relationships among staff and students, the consensus again indicated, positive connections were built with non-Native teachers. All participants reinforced the notion that with non-Native teachers they had “great relations”, “nice teachers”, teachers who were “respectful and always communicated”. The parents never had any concerns with non-Native teachers and simply felt that a quality teacher positively impacted their child, and race was never a consideration. When describing a teacher that was difficult, or challenging to get along with, it was a First Nation teacher who was mentioned by both a student and a parent. Both of these participants suggested that this teacher had a detrimental impact on some of the children’s learning, thus indicating that being a First Nation teacher for a First Nation child does not necessarily mean that a positive relationship will ensue.

The ideas discussed in this theme clearly indicated that *inter-racial relationships* play an important role in the connections that are built between teachers and students, as well as between students themselves. In a globalized world that is technologically connected, there are benefits to

being integrated in a setting that is multi-cultural and ethnically diverse. There is a great deal of value in being immersed in a learning setting among children from a variety of ancestral heritages. The evidence in my research was clear that there was a positive impact upon children who had attended a public elementary school because of the networking that takes place among a more varied group of people.

Traditional/Cultural values and skills. The fact that there is a theme of *traditional/cultural values and skills* to be recognized in my research, after the historical attempts to destroy First Nations culture by the colonizing forces in this country, speaks volumes to the values of First Nations people. The community where my research took place was no different. It has been represented in research (Atleo & Fitzner, 2010; Levin, 2009; Mendelson, 2008) that negative practices have been forced upon First Nations communities, especially in terms of enforced education. First Nations control of First Nations education became a rallying cry in 1972 and changes have occurred (Mendelson, 2008). However, equality in the education of First Nations children, especially those on-reserve, is lacking (Spence, White & Maxim, 2007). *Traditional/cultural values and skills* were recognized as a basis for sending the children of this community to the band-operated school, yet this topic was viewed as requiring more purposeful instruction in both the school systems.

The responses to the questionnaire statement of *The elementary school provided First Nation's culture and history* showed that some community members acknowledged the efforts of the schools, while overall most participants felt neutral about the schools efforts. The most positively impacted were the parents of the public schools, yet these results were in contrast to the students of the public school who felt less positive about this theme. Although parents and students of the band-operated school felt agreeable to the First Nations culture and history in the

school, more than half were still undecided. This datum clearly shows that with such high amounts of undecided responses that community members expect better implementation of First Nation's culture and history from the school systems.

Bell et al (2004) found that in some communities, culture and traditional skills were best suited to be learned in the home, while other communities found it important for these lessons to occur in the school. In the communities that found it important for these lessons to occur in the school, the desire was for increased Aboriginal content and principles in the schooling systems, as well as improved "First Language" (Blair, Rice, Wood & Janvier, 2002; Taylor, Plaice & Perley, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). This was expressly true in the case of my research too. Parents wished to see more traditional activities incorporated into the curriculum, and students yearned to have a deeper understanding of their "First Language". The findings showed that this community wanted the school to be central in the revitalization of *traditional/cultural values and skills*.

In my own research, the qualitative data demonstrated that community members feel passionate about their culture. One parent stated that "I really enjoy the community for having the cultural aspect incorporated in the class." Participants were somewhat satisfied with the culture and traditions children learned in each schooling system as another parent commented, "with the elementary schools off-reserve they are slowly coming into the Aboriginal aspect and noticing the importance that they need to have that in the class." Yet they all wanted a greater degree of cultural and traditional skills and values to be employed in the schools.

Parents were more inclined to want a better level of experiential learning that included cultural activities, while the students were keener to learn about the history of their people and to gain more foundational use of the "First Language". Both school systems had some impact upon

the participants when it came to this theme, with the band-operated school being seen as having more potential to increase the Aboriginal content. In describing her perception of the difference between the band-operated school and the public schools, one of the public-school students claimed “I heard they do some traditional stuff here (band-operated school) and that is an advantage because you are Native.” Another public-school student stated that he also thought there was more going on at the band-operated school in this capacity. “I think cultural classes are a bit stronger

The expertise of working on the trap line, or hunting for one’s food, were abilities that meant survival for First Nations people in the past. In the present times, reasons for hunting and trapping are not so dependent on the need or necessity for surviving. These activities play a significant role in what it meant, and continues to mean, to be an Aboriginal person. Participants in my research wanted more learning on the land by utilizing knowledgeable locals to lead hands-on pursuits such as hunting, trapping, fishing, berry/plant picking.

Curriculum changes in British Columbia have brought new realization to the benefits of including Aboriginal content in the classroom. There have been courses added at the high school level such as English First Peoples and Social Studies content is inclined to be more inclusive of the First Nations history. Many units of study, which include Science and a grade five residential school unit, have been designed by the First Nations Education Steering Committee in order for Aboriginal content to be more accessible for teachers at the elementary level.

The “First Language” in this community, as with many other First Nations communities, is being used less and less as fluent speakers pass on. However, revitalizing these “First Languages” was seen as integral to keeping the connection to their history, community, and

culture. The band-operated school provided a daily class of language and culture and as one parent stated of her child, “it was really good for him”.

The benefits of learning and applying the “First Language” was deemed as having a positive impact on the children from the band-operated school. One of these students explained how aware she was of the importance of learning to speak some of her “First Language”. She asserted, “I knew I’ve always wanted to get into the culture stuff because like my grandma said that our language is dying and now I’m slowly but surely trying to get back into all that stuff.” This statement was indicative of not only the desire to bring back what has been overlooked in the past, but also that the student has a great deal of respect for the thoughts of her grandmother. This was a clear example of showing respect towards an elder, which is a cultural value of First Nations people.

The public school *traditional/cultural values and skills* impact was not recognized as positively as the band-operated school *traditional/cultural values and skills* impact. There was more going on at the band-operated school that reflected learning in a traditional sense. It was reported by all participants that there was a slight degree of cultural recognition occurring at the public schools, with a more rounded program at the band-operated school. Yet overall, there was a desire for more cultural involvement to take place in both settings.

Chapter Summary

My research set out to inquire what different elementary school systems provided for children and how families were impacted by these different educational facilities. I sought to qualify and quantify the experiences of the community by seeking comparative responses to my research question, which asked why do families choose one elementary school over another?.

So, throughout this thesis I was focussed on the research question: *To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the community in a public elementary school?*

Furthermore, I gained insight and clarification on the benefits and drawbacks of each schooling system to the questions: *What might be the effects of elementary school experiences that influence the high school successes of children from the community?; Is one school system impacting the students more positively than the other?*. Finally, in order to answer the question: *How is it more positively impacting the children, or what might be taking place at this facility that is making it more effective in student achievement?*, I was able to discern what could be done to improve the learning situations for First Nations students. These elements were addressed in the questionnaires, as well as through the parental individual interviews and the student focus group discussions. Throughout this chapter, I discussed the responses that supported the themes of *family, pride and confidence, appropriate academics and learning, local connections and conveniences, inter-racial relationships, and traditional/cultural skills and values*.

Comparisons between the two school systems of the children in this community, inspired a great deal of advantageous and disadvantageous reasons for choosing one system over the other. There were a number of reasons and rationale for what each school system provided for the students, and there were areas that were viewed as pros and cons for each system. Ultimately, it seemed clear that education was essential and a highly regarded commodity regardless of the elementary school system. Parents and children all found their experiences to

be valuable, and they all felt that Aboriginal education was moving in a positive direction overall.

The theme of *family* impacted each school group in different ways. There was agreement among all participants that parental and family input was essential for children to be successful in their education. The importance of this theme echoed the findings of Bell et al. (2004) and Mattson and Caffrey (2001). Family is the cornerstone of positive educational outcomes and is the main factor in promoting successful attainment through a constructive home/school relationship. The difference between the band-operated school and the public schools, was the employment positions held by family members in the band-operated school. The presence of family members in the band-operated school was viewed with positive and negative connotations. Positive in the way that family members were recognized as role models and seen in different capacities. While the negative was noted as having family members in the different capacities had the potential to interfere with the familial bond. Family members working in the schools of the public system was non-existent.

Pride/confidence was the theme that had the next most influential impact. In some cases, pride and confidence were qualities of the individual person. However, other themes impacted this quality and could be attributed to one of the school systems. Hyslop (2011) indicated that the degree to which student pride was exhibited generally related to their level of success in school, and this was also the case in my own findings. The public system was credited with providing a stronger academic proficiency and increased inter-racial relationships, which more positively impacted these children in their pride and confidence. While the band-operated school more positively impacted these students with local connections and conveniences, and traditional/cultural values and skills that imparted pride and confidence upon these children.

Pride/confidence was a trait that could be supported, developed, and nurtured by the particular school and each school system was effective in some aspects, and could improve in others.

Achieving a high standard of learning was noted in the *appropriate academics and learning* theme. The need to higher academic results for on-reserve, First Nations children was expressed by the Canadian Council for Learning (2009). In my findings, there was discrepancy among the two different schooling systems. The public schools were recognized for providing a more challenging curriculum and better preparing students for the rigor of high school. The children from the public schools had a much more positive impression on their academic abilities than the band-operated school. Maintaining high expectations, and ensuring all learners are taught with the best and most up to date practices, would help to improve the band-operated school's academics.

Local connections and conveniences was a key point to the positive impact that the band-operated school provided. Hare and Pidgeon (2007) described the benefits for children who grow up with a sense of community and locality in their schooling atmosphere. This was true to the research that I conducted as well. Proximity, and being in the community, was a part of this theme that was expressed as important for the children. The longer days and riding the bus into town, especially during the winter months, was noted to be stressful for some parents and children. The other aspect that made for a beneficial experience among the band-operated students was the meal programs. By ensuring there was a breakfast and hot lunch program, the band-operated school was seen to have provided a need that might have been missing in some of the children's lives.

A key point to the positive impact that the public schools provided was the theme of *inter-racial relationships*. Learning in multi-cultural settings is an asset for children as they are

better able to understand the diversity of society (Richards & Vinings, 2004). The participants in my study discussed their beliefs in much the same way. There was a larger peer group for children from the public schools, and the ability to network with children from other cultures and backgrounds, was recognized as a valuable attribute of the public schools. The opportunity to be educated in an elementary school that was outside the community allowed for a greater access to a multi-cultured setting, as the band-operated school was identified as a mono-cultural setting.

A mono-cultural setting helped foster the final theme in my research, which was *traditional/cultural values and skills*. Bell et al. (2004), and Wotherspoon and Schissel (1998) found First Nations children benefit from having the knowledge and skills of their history and traditions. As well, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2016) stated that revitalization of “First Languages” is central to the improved education of on-reserve children. These studies were found to be in agreement with the thoughts of participants in my own study. This theme was a positive component of the band-operated school as most participants thought more traditional activities took place and there was more emphasis on reclaiming the “First Language”. However, even though the band-operated school was deemed to have more significance within this theme, it was voiced that all schools could do more to improve the degree to which First Nation content and principles were being implemented.

The reciprocity of the themes in my research concluded with a view that many, if not all the themes, built upon themselves and increased the impact from one to another. This research suggested that Aboriginal children who are confident and knowledgeable about their history and have an understanding of their cultural values and skills, will develop a sense of pride through the learning that takes place from role models, family and local connections. These proficiencies can better prepare on-reserve children for improved interracial connections, as well as giving

them the desire to achieve a high standard of academic successes. The ability of a specific school, or school system, to foster these standards and nurture the First Nation students from this community to strive for high rates of success were evident. It is not about working to improve upon one of these themes, it is a requirement that the schools provide all of them together.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the first chapter of this thesis, I detailed the rationale and reasoning behind my choice for completing this research. In the second chapter, I presented the literature review, which examined many of the issues central to the overarching concept of Aboriginal Education. In the third chapter, I reviewed the methods, designs, and philosophical foundations that guided the research, as well as the quantitative and qualitative relevance, and the specific format of the research. In Chapter 4, I provided a description of the data, as well as recognizing the role of both the quantitative and qualitative results in the research. In the fifth chapter, I discussed the findings from the data collection, and conducted an in-depth review of questionnaire responses, individual interview, and focus group discussions.

In this sixth chapter, I will commence with a review of the purpose of this study and an evaluation of the questions that guided the research. I will conclude the chapter with the implications of this research and recommendations for future studies.

Review of Purpose

This research was conducted to establish the differences for children from a First Nation reserve, with regards to their elementary schooling experiences in public and band-operated schools. The study further sought out explanations and rationales for choosing to have these children attend a community based, band-operated school or a school from the public system, which was approximately 35 kilometres away. The guiding question in this research was: “To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the community in a public elementary school?” Other questions included, “What might be the

effects of elementary school experiences that influence the high school successes of children from the community?; Is one school system impacting the students more positively than the other?; How is it more positively impacting the children, or what might be taking place at this facility that is making it more effective in student achievement?”

Impacts upon First Nation, On-Reserve Students from a Public-School System and a Band-Operated School

In my study, it was revealed that children who had attended a public elementary school were impacted differently than children who had attended a band-operated elementary school, and high school achievement was affected in ways that demonstrated advantageous and disadvantageous elements for each school system. First Nations children are influenced by many factors throughout their education, which include the six themes that I discovered in my research; *family, pride/confidence, appropriate learning and academics, local connections and conveniences, inter-racial relationships, and traditional/cultural values and skills*. These themes were confirmed in previous research (Agbo, 2012; Atleo and Fitznor, 2010; Blair, Rice, Wood & Janvier, 2002; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Hare & Pidgeon, 2004; Mattson & Caffrey, 2001). However, these studies did not relate to the school systems as two different enterprises and the literature rarely took into account both school systems side by side. The phenomenological comparative scripts that I utilized provided an opportunity to investigate community experiences with different schooling systems.

The gathering of quantitative and qualitative data offered the thoughts of community members that showed benefits and drawbacks of each elementary school system. The findings regarded the public school as giving a better opportunity to experience multi-cultural learning settings, which also eased the transition into high school as these schools had larger peer groups.

As well, academics were claimed to be of a higher quality in the public-school system and this was one of the ways the public schools helped to develop pride and confidence in the students. The main drawback to attending one of the public schools was the commute that made the day much longer. Children had over an hour added to their day because of the bus ride to and from the town. Another improvement noted in this research was that public schools could do more to incorporate Aboriginal activities and context to learning.

The data likewise demonstrated the aspects of the band-operated school that were expressed as positive and negative. Family was a main component to being in this school system. Family members were classmates and role models in the school as employees. Learning in the home community and building a stronger sense of local connections was recognized as a positive factor for attending the band-operated school. This, in turn, helped support a level of pride that was unique compared to the public-school students. Traditional teaching and “First Language” skills were recognized as adequate, but there was still a desire for better cultural programming. The other aspect that was deemed as requiring improvement was the quality of instruction, in order to ensure that academic achievement was of the highest standard.

Educational Implications

This study reinforced many of the ideas related to the current literature, in regards to successful practices for Aboriginal Education. It was demonstrated that First Nations children can attain better graduation results when specific factors are exhibited (Bell et al., 2004; Hyslop, 2011; Levin, 2009). This research was representative of a community’s perceptions and provided an effective use of a phenomenologically-based theoretical form of research. Also, this study demonstrated some of the implications that could be recognized in Aboriginal education

within the structures of the provincial public-school system, and the federal, on-reserve school system.

This study demonstrated many of the qualities in education that can shape the future for First Nations learners. As the literature suggested, there is a need for improved graduation results for Aboriginal students, and the need for appropriate elementary experiences is paramount to success into high school and beyond. In my research, I found that for the best opportunity to exist for First Nations students, pride and confidence must be fostered to the highest possible degree and this quality of pride and confidence was developed differently in the band-operated school as compared to the public-school system.

The successful elements of the public-school system allowed for First Nation, on-reserve children to better understand other children and other cultures. In order for this positive quality to be integrated in a supportive format for those children in the band-operated school, more opportunity to participate in activities with non-Native children could occur. Making connections with classes and peers that will eventually be in high school together would increase the degree of pride. Such opportunities could include sporting events, participating in common learning experiences and creating a pen pal or buddy network with children of each of the school systems.

The major impact that the band-operated school developed was the recognition of family as part of the education circle and having a sense of connection and pride in community. This could be fostered through the public schools by investing resources into parent interaction days, increasing the opportunity for family members to participate in meaningful school or class events, and recognizing the community which the First Nation children come from as a proud and historically relevant place. These types of situations would allow for the First Nation

children to better connect with their elementary school and increase the pride in their culture. Each school system could take what was noted as effective pedagogy and practice and design a way to incorporate it as the standard to their own schools.

Personally, I would make the recommendation, in Moricetown and elsewhere, of the importance of best practice with Indigenous children and youth. For instance, development of language nests and increased First Language competency would support improved cultural values. As well, teachers should be educating themselves on Aboriginal history to build empathy and understanding; consulting with Aboriginal workers and elders from communities to connect traditional knowledge to their existing knowledge; and for decision makers to be increasing their presence in both the curriculum and the classroom.

Further research

This thesis resolved to find out what two different elementary school systems did to impact the children of a small First Nation community. While many First Nations communities do not have the opportunity to conduct research similar to this, there are other directions that this type of research could investigate. Firstly, conducting a longitudinal study that tracked the children from each of the elementary schools from grade 8 to graduation, would clearly represent the results of which elementary school had higher graduation rates.

Another possibility would be to re-do this same research at some point in the future. The participants in my research had recently completed secondary school or were at the end of their secondary schooling. In education, teachers change, school leaders change and programs within the classrooms change. Through professional development and changes in personal at the

schools, the results could be quite different in a future study. By conducting similar research at a later date, evidence of those changes may be fruitful.

Finally, completing a comparison study with two different communities could provide for insightful understanding. Developing research that included one First Nation reserve that only had access to a band-operated school, and another First Nation reserve that solely had access to a public school, would give the researcher the same comparative script to work with but participant opinions would be more based on the one system of schooling. An analysis of this kind would divulge how these potential communities felt about their specific elementary school situation and what might be the advantages and drawbacks.

Concluding remarks

I feel that conducting this research has helped me grow as a researcher in the social sciences, as a teacher in general, and specifically, as an Aboriginal educator. Continuing to support and develop the best possible opportunities for First Nations children is central to my position and to my career path. I have learned what two different school systems are doing that best guides the children of the community where I work, and I am better able to understand why families choose one or the other of these educational institutions.

The results in my research found some similarities and some differences with the two schooling systems, and aspects of each that benefit First Nation learners. By developing the skills and qualities mentioned in this study, the children with a high degree of pride and confidence can flourish in their education. Pride and confidence must be supported through positive family and school relationships, providing challenging and stimulating academic standards that incorporate Aboriginal awareness, traditional learning and cultural experiences. In

the true form of reconciliation, the school has the responsibility to promote the true history of First Nations peoples and cultures in a most positive and powerful way. Aboriginal communities of Canada have suffered under colonial repression, government and church suppression, and decimation by disease. With the opportunity to right the wrongs of history, education stands as the foundation to build pride and confidence in First Nations students, and develop a better understanding among non-Native students.

The implications for policy makers are already being seen in such instances as the British Columbia curriculum changes that have mandated Aboriginal principles of learning and First Nations content integrated into all subjects. This highlights the direction of education with a positive light being shed on the cultures and traditions of First Nations, rather than the Euro-centrally dominated curriculum of the recent past. Policy makers must take the responsibility to provide guidance and professional development to support teacher's implementation of these mandated instructional competencies. All school districts and all on-reserve schools have the required duty to make these improvements to the structure of education.

As discussed in this research, teachers are the front-line workers who have the most direct impact upon students. Therefore, these school staff members should attend any and all professional development in the field related to Aboriginal Education. Another opportunity that would improve Aboriginal Education in both school systems is to seek out knowledgeable experts and elders and to be able to use them in various capacities within the classroom. With graduation rates improving, but not on par, the need to continue the acceleration of First Nations students into proud, knowledgeable and proficient students attaining equal achievement to non-Native students is paramount. This is the most important que to take from The Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In my study, the evidence provided an explanation that there were different impacts upon First Nation children from the public-school system and the band-operated school system and that by improving in certain aspects, a more positive high school achievement is possible. Incorporating the findings and suggestions in this research will further improve educational systems, and improve learning situations for non-Native children, and improve graduation results for First-Nations children. In the present time of history, a clearer light is being shed on First Nations people and opening doors in society like no other time in history. The onus of truth and reconciliation should be the foremost attribute of all educational institutions. The instruction taking place should mirror these qualities that promote First Nations music, art, literature, language and history, in a way that guides all learners to achieve at high levels at all times.

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Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**

MEMORANDUM

To: Aaron Burgess
CC: Andrew Kitchenham

From: Henry Harder, Interim Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: February 10, 2016

Re: E2015.1110.106.00
Investigating the Impact upon First Nations Students On-Reserve, in
Relation to Their Elementary School Experience

Thank you for submitting the above-noted proposal to the Research Ethics Board (REB). Your proposal has been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the REB.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Dr. Henry Harder
Interim Chair, Research Ethics Board

Appendix B

Investigating the Impact upon First Nations Students On-Reserve, in Relation to Their Elementary School Experience

The purpose of this study is to assess the influence of elementary school experiences in terms of preparedness for high school, and what the successes might be for Aboriginal students in Northern B.C.

The information that is to be collected is essentially opinion and experience based knowledge from human participants. I will initially distribute questionnaires for some quantitative data, then move into some interviewing and focus group discussions for further qualitative data. These methods are intended to provide descriptive, lived experiences of the participants. All research will take place in the community of Moricetown, B.C., in the elementary school library.

My role in the research is to recruit participants and collect the data. The data will be analyzed by myself and then it will be coded and themed with the results written up in the thesis paper. I am a teacher in the school in Moricetown and will be conducting this research to provide the community, and educators in general, insight into the reasons for children attending a chosen elementary school.

Participants will be recruited from a purposively designed format. I will identify all children who are attending high school, or have recently graduated from high school, and hand-deliver questionnaires to the students and their parents/guardians. Band administration has records of all children from Moricetown who attend, or have recently graduated from, high school. I would seek consent from the band manager, band council or education director to access these files. As well, having worked with children and families in Moricetown for eight years, I am familiar with a great deal of community members and their various schooling scenerios. I will then follow up with letters inquiring from participants about who may be interested in further involvement in the research through focus groups and interviews. Initially I will distribute the questionnaire face to face and I will anticipate community members will approach me after receiving the letter describing the qualitative nature of the research.

I am a teacher in the band-operated, community school. This could create a potential or perceived conflict of interest as my own bias with regards to educational formats may come to fruition. However, all data collected and analyzed will be that of community members, and from the phenomenological point of view, my interpretation and potential bias should not be a factor in this research. I will minimize or avoid any conflict of interest by ensuring interview and focus group discussion content is expressed in equal terms for all participants. I will further ensure that all participants are made to feel comfortable and appreciated at all times. At no time will there be any reason for me to include my point of view as all data is to be from parents/guardians and students.

Educational experiences can evoke negative psychological feelings for members of First Nations who have endured residential schools. I would intend to minimize this by noting that the content of this research revolves around present experiences and I will attempt to further manage any emotional risk by including the name and contact information of the community counsellor.

The task of educators is to ensure that Aboriginal children have the opportunity to excel in their schooling and to provide the best possible experience for them. There will not only be local community members involved in data collection as participants, the results should also aim to support the whole community in demonstrating the strengths and areas requiring improvement so as to better educate the children. Furthermore, the audience who would gain from this research include the local band and council, parents and school staff. The extended benefit of this study would also be aimed for all Aboriginal educators, and specifically, all reserves that provide educational services through an independent school. Any entity, whether it human or agency, that serve Aboriginal communities are potential stakeholders in the research.

Appendix C

Moricetown Band Administration

Band Manager

Mailing Address:

Suite #3 - 205 Beaver Road
Smithers, BC
V0J 2N1

Telephone: (250) 847 - 2133**Location Address:**

205 Beaver Road
Moricetown, BC
Canada

Fax: (250) 847 - 9291

December 15, 2015

Aaron Burgess

Please find a letter of support from the Moricetown Band to use the educational learning experience of Moricetown students for your Master's Thesis. The only requirement that the Band Council has is that your paper be shared with them upon completion.

Should you need any further information, please don't hesitate to contact me at the above phone number or via email at lucy.gagnon@morictown.ca.

Yours truly,

Lucy Gagnon,
Executive Director

*"Serving our community with pride, providing services
and programs to enhance the development of our nation."*

Appendix D



Information Letter / Consent Form for Underage Participants (Questionnaire)

Date: Monday, February-08-16

Project Title: Investigating the Impact upon First Nations Students On-Reserve, in Relation to Their Elementary School Experience

Project Lead: M. Aaron Burgess

Special Education Master's Thesis/School of Education

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

250-847-2244

E-mail:burgessm@unbc.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Kitchenham Professor and Chair

Master of Education (Special Education and MDL) Coordinators

School of Education

250-960-6707

Email:Andrew.Kitchenham@unbc.ca

Purpose of Project: Why am I doing this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you have a child who has either recently completed high school, or is soon to be completing high school. Your participation in this research is voluntary and at any time you can refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason. I recognize the potential for a conflict of interest in this research as I am a teacher at Moricetown Elementary School and will proceed with due care and diligence to alleviate any potential bias.

What will happen during the project?

If you say 'Yes', here is how the study will be conducted:

- At the beginning of the study you will be asked to fill out and return a questionnaire. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.
- The next step will be to voluntarily participate in a focus group discussion at an agreed upon time and place. This focus group discussion will be conducted by me, will be recorded, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential. The focus group discussion

should last approximately 45 minutes. If you agree to the focus group discussion-you will be given a separate consent form.

- If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn and securely destroyed, unless you explicitly consent to your information being retained and analyzed.

Risks or benefits to participating in the project: Is there any way that participating in this study could harm you?

Some of the questions I will ask may seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to. In the case that any question triggers a negative emotional response and you require the services of a counsellor, Moricetown Youth and Family Counsellor, Louis Moolman, is available to be contacted at 250-847-9328, ext. 408. Other counselling services that are able to be contacted include The Northern Society for Domestic Peace, Jennifer Marchand, 250-847-9000 and Dze L K'ant Friendship Society, Christina Hughes, 250-847-5211.

There may also be potential for social risks to arise from participating in this research which could include loss of privacy or reputation. I will attempt to manage these risks by repeating that participants are not to share any information and are to remain in confidence of the topics of discussion.

A final legal risk that could occur is any sort of child abuse situations that may be presented. If this were to be the case, I would again provide that opportunity to access a professional counsellor, as well as bound myself to informing the proper authorities.

Will being in this study help you in any way? What are the benefits of participating?

You may be helped in this study by gaining knowledge and understanding about the benefits and drawbacks for the children of Moricetown in how being educated in various elementary school settings affects their success in high school. This study may further serve to support First Nations learners and educators beyond your home community.

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Storage: How will your identity be protected? How will your privacy be maintained?

Your anonymity will be respected. Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed, the only people to see the raw data would be me, and my supervisor, if I am to seek his support. There would be no information that discloses your identity. All questionnaires will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in my home office. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The information gathered from this study will be kept for three years. It will then be securely destroyed [e.g. by shredding paper files].

Compensation

You will not be paid for participating in this study. However, all participants who return questionnaires may enter a draw for a twenty dollar gift card for Moricetown gas bar. Also, all interview participants will be entered into a draw for a twenty dollar I-Tunes gift card.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis. I will provide the opportunity for my thesis to be read by participants who express interest and will provide an electronic copy, or a summarization of the findings, through email, or a hard copy if requested. You can contact me through email or phone should you wish to have a copy of the thesis or summarization of findings. You should also know that anonymized data may be used in scholarly publications or presentations in the future.

Questions or Concerns about the project: Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions about what I am asking of you, please contact the project lead or supervisor. The names, emails and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

Contact for Complaints: Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

CONSENT

I have read or been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested.

YES NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind.

YES NO

I have been given a copy of this form.

YES NO

I agree that my name can be used.

YES NO

I consent/I do not consent (circle one) to my child's participation in the study.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant
signing above

Parent or Guardian Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant Parent or
Guardian

Appendix E



Information Letter / Consent Form for Parents/Guardians (Questionnaire)

Date: Monday, February-08-16

Project Title: Investigating the Impact upon First Nations Students On-Reserve, in Relation to Their Elementary School Experience

Project Lead: M. Aaron Burgess

Special Education Master's Thesis/School of Education

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

250-847-2244

E-mail:burgessm@unbc.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Kitchenham Professor and Chair

Master of Education (Special Education and MDL) Coordinators

School of Education

250-960-6707

Email:Andrew.Kitchenham@unbc.ca

Purpose of Project: Why am I doing this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you have a child who has either recently completed high school, or is soon to be completing high school. Your participation in this research is voluntary and at any time you can refuse to answer any questions or undergo any procedures that make you feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason. I recognize the potential for a conflict of interest in this research as I am a teacher at Moricetown Elementary School and will proceed with due care and diligence to alleviate any potential bias.

What will happen during the project?

If you say 'Yes', here is how the study will be conducted:

- At the beginning of the study you will be asked to fill out and return a questionnaire. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.
- The next step will be to voluntarily participate in one individual interview at an agreed upon time and place. This interview will be conducted by me, will be recorded, and all

responses will be kept strictly confidential. The interview should last approximately 45 minutes. If you agree to the interview you will be given a separate consent form.

- If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn and securely destroyed, unless you explicitly consent to your information being retained and analyzed.

Risks or benefits to participating in the project: Is there any way that participating in this study could harm you?

Some of the questions I will ask may seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to. In the case that any question triggers a negative emotional response and you require the services of a counsellor, Moricetown Youth and Family Counsellor, Louis Moolman, is available to be contacted at 250-847-9328, ext. 408. Other counselling services that are able to be contacted include The Northern Society for Domestic Peace, Jennifer Marchand, 250-847-9000, and Dze L K'ant Friendship Society, Christina Hughes, 250-847-5211.

There may also be potential for social risks to arise from participating in this research which could include loss of privacy or reputation. I will attempt to manage these risks by repeating that participants are not to share any information and are to remain in confidence of the topics of discussion.

A final legal risk that could occur is any sort of child abuse situations that may be presented. If this were to be the case, I would again provide that opportunity to access a professional counsellor, as well as bound myself to informing the proper authorities.

Will being in this study help you in any way? What are the benefits of participating?

You may be helped in this study by gaining knowledge and understanding about the benefits and drawbacks for the children of Moricetown in how being educated in various elementary school settings affects their success in high school. This study may further serve to support First Nations learners and educators beyond your home community.

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Storage: How will your identity be protected? How will your privacy be maintained?

Your anonymity will be respected. Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed, the only people to see the raw data would be me, and my supervisor, if I am to seek his support. There would be no information that discloses your identity. All questionnaires will be identified only by code number and kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in my home office. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The information gathered from this study will be kept for three years. It will then be securely destroyed [e.g. by shredding paper files].

Compensation

You will not be paid for participating in this study. However, all participants who return questionnaires may enter a draw for a twenty dollar gift card for Moricetown gas bar. Also, all interview participants will be entered into a draw for a twenty dollar Canadian Tire gift card.

Study Results

Appendix F



Information Letter / Consent Form for Underage Participants (Focus Groups)

Date: Monday, February-08-16

Project Title: Investigating the Impact upon First Nations Students On-Reserve, in Relation to Their Elementary School Experience

Project Lead: M. Aaron Burgess

Special Education Master's Thesis/School of Education

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

250-847-2244

E-mail:burgessm@unbc.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Kitchenham Professor and Chair

Master of Education (Special Education and MDL) Coordinators

School of Education

250-960-6707

Email:Andrew.Kitchenham@unbc.ca

Purpose of Project: Why am I doing this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you have a child who has either recently completed high school, or is soon to be completing high school. Your participation in this research is voluntary and at any time you can refuse to answer any questions or undergo any procedures that make you feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason. I recognize the potential for a conflict of interest in this research as I am a teacher at Moricetown Elementary School and will proceed with due care and diligence to alleviate any potential bias.

What will happen during the project?

If you say 'Yes', here is how the study will be conducted:

- At the beginning of the study you were asked to fill out and return a questionnaire. The questionnaire should have taken approximately 20 minutes to complete.
- The next step will be to voluntarily participate in a focus group discussion at an agreed-upon time and place. This focus group discussion will be conducted by me, will be recorded and transcribed, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential. The focus group discussion should last approximately 45 minutes.

- If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn and securely destroyed, unless you explicitly consent to your information being retained and analyzed.

Risks or benefits to participating in the project: Is there any way that participating in this study could harm you?

Some of the questions I will ask may seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to. In the case that any question triggers a negative emotional response and you require the services of a counsellor, Moricetown Youth and Family Counsellor, Louis Moolman, is available to be contacted at 250-847-9328, ext. 408. Other counselling services that are able to be contacted include The Northern Society for Domestic Peace, Jennifer Marchand, 250-847-9000, Dze L K'ant Friendship Society, Christina Hughes, 250-847-5211.

There may also be potential for social risks to arise from participating in this research which could include loss of privacy or reputation. I will attempt to manage these risks by repeating that participants are not to share any information and are to remain in confidence of the topics of discussion. A final legal risk that could occur is any sort of child abuse situations that may be presented. If this were to be the case, I would again provide that opportunity to access a professional counsellor, as well as bound myself to informing the proper authorities.

Will being in this study help you in any way? What are the benefits of participating?

You may be helped in this study by gaining knowledge and understanding about the benefits and drawbacks for the children of Moricetown in how being educated in various elementary school settings affects their success in high school. This study may further serve to support First Nations learners and educators beyond your home community.

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Storage: How will your identity be protected? How will your privacy be maintained?

Your anonymity will be respected, however due to the small number of people in the group, I cannot guarantee anonymity or confidentiality but ask that all members of the focus group do not share the identities or comments from the group with anyone outside of the focus group. Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed, the only people to see the raw data would be me, and my supervisor, if I am to seek his support. There would be no information that discloses your identity. If the need to identify your participation in this research is required of me by law, I would contact you with the specifics and respect all your wishes. All focus group discussions will be identified only by code number, stored on a USB stick and kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in my home office. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The information gathered from this study will be kept for three years. It will then be securely destroyed [e.g. by deleting digital files].

Compensation

You will not be paid for participating in this study. However, all focus group participants will be entered into a draw for a twenty dollar iTunes gift card.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis. I will provide the opportunity for my thesis to be read by participants who express interest and will provide an electronic copy, or a summarization of the findings, through email, or a hard copy if requested. You can contact me through email or phone should you wish to have a copy of the thesis or summarization of findings. You should also know that anonymized data may be used in scholarly publications or presentations in the future.

Date

Printed Name of the Participant Parent or
Guardian

Appendix G



Information Letter / Consent Form for Parents/Guardians (Interview)

Date: Monday, February-08-16

Project Title: Investigating the Impact upon First Nations Students On-Reserve, in Relation to Their Elementary School Experience

Project Lead: M. Aaron Burgess

Special Education Master's Thesis/School of Education

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

250-847-2244

E-mail:burgessm@unbc.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Kitchenham Professor and Chair

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School of Education

250-960-6707

Email:Andrew.Kitchenham@unbc.ca

Purpose of Project: Why am I doing this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you have a child who has either recently completed high school, or is soon to be completing high school. Your participation in this research is voluntary and at any time you can refuse to answer any questions or undergo any procedures that make you feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time, without giving a reason. I recognize the potential for a conflict of interest in this research as I am a teacher at Moricetown Elementary School and will proceed with due care and diligence to alleviate any potential bias.

What will happen during the project?

If you say 'Yes', here is how the study will be conducted:

- At the beginning of the study you were asked to fill out and return a questionnaire. The questionnaire should have taken approximately 20 minutes to complete.
- The next step will be to voluntarily participate in one individual interview at an agreed-upon time and place. This interview will be conducted by me, will be recorded and

transcribed, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential. The interview should last approximately 45 minutes.

- If you choose to withdraw from the study, any information you have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn and securely destroyed, unless you explicitly consent to your information being retained and analyzed.

Risks or benefits to participating in the project: Is there any way that participating in this study could harm you?

Some of the questions I will ask may seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to. In the case that any question triggers a negative emotional response and you require the services of a counsellor, Moricetown Youth and Family Counsellor, Louis Moolman, is available to be contacted at 250-847-9328, ext. 408. Other counselling services that are able to be contacted include The Northern Society for Domestic Peace, Jennifer Marchand, 250-847-9000, Dze L K'ant Friendship Society, Christina Hughes, 250-847-5211.

There may also be potential for social risks to arise from participating in this research which could include loss of privacy or reputation. I will attempt to manage these risks by repeating that participants are not to share any information and are to remain in confidence of the topics of discussion.

A final legal risk that could occur is any sort of child abuse situations that may be presented. If this were to be the case, I would again provide that opportunity to access a professional counsellor, as well as bound myself to informing the proper authorities.

Will being in this study help you in any way? What are the benefits of participating?

You may be helped in this study by gaining knowledge and understanding about the benefits and drawbacks for the children of Moricetown in how being educated in various elementary school settings affects their success in high school. This study may further serve to support First Nations learners and educators beyond your home community.

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Storage: How will your identity be protected? How will your privacy be maintained?

Your anonymity will be respected, however due to the small number of people being interviewed, I cannot guarantee anonymity. Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed, the only people to see the raw data would be me, and my supervisor, if I am to seek his support. There would be no information that discloses your identity. If the need to identify your participation in this research is required of me by law, I would contact you with the specifics and respect all your wishes. All interviews will be identified only by code number, stored on an USB stick and kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in my home office. You will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. The information gathered from this study will be kept for three years. It will then be securely destroyed [e.g. by deleting digital files].

Compensation

You will not be paid for participating in this study. However, all interview participants will be entered into a draw for a twenty dollar Canadian Tire gift card.

Study Results

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis. I will provide the opportunity for my thesis to be read by participants who express interest and will provide an electronic copy, or a summarization of

Appendix H

Date: _____

Likert Scale Questionnaire for Students

Directions: Please circle one of the following answers which best describes your experience with elementary schooling (SD=strongly disagree D=disagree U=undecided A=agree SA=strongly agree). By completing this questionnaire, you consent to having your results published. All participants who complete the questionnaire can enter a draw for a gift card. Responses will remain anonymous and a separate draw slip for your personal information will be used exclusively for the draw, then destroyed. Thank-you for your ideas and input.

1. At my elementary school I felt

Safe and comfortable	SD	D	U	A	SA
The teachers helped me to learn to my best ability	SD	D	U	A	SA
I was cared for	SD	D	U	A	SA
Learning was important	SD	D	U	A	SA
There were difficult subjects	SD	D	U	A	SA
Bullied or ignored	SD	D	U	A	SA
There was opportunity for fun activities	SD	D	U	A	SA
I was being prepared for high school	SD	D	U	A	SA
Connected to the students and staff	SD	D	U	A	SA
Proud of where I was	SD	D	U	A	SA

2. My elementary school provided me

Knowledge of technology use	SD	D	U	A	SA
Physical education training	SD	D	U	A	SA
Effective reading and writing lessons	SD	D	U	A	SA
The math skills I needed	SD	D	U	A	SA
The opportunity to learn about the world	SD	D	U	A	SA
First Nation's culture and history	SD	D	U	A	SA

3. Did you attend Moricetown Elementary School? Yes No
4. Was your bus ride more than 30 minutes? Yes No
5. Did you have brothers or sisters at your school? Yes No

6. Did you ever have family members (parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle) visit the school or your classroom?
Yes No
7. Was your school a good place to be? Yes No
8. Describe what you liked about going to this school.
9. Describe what you did not like about going to this school.
10. List any other ways your school could have better supported you or helped you be prepared to be successful in high school.

Appendix I

Date: _____

Likert Scale Questionnaire for Parents/Guardians

Directions: Please circle one of the following answers which best describes your experience with elementary schooling (SD=strongly disagree D=disagree U=undecided A=agree SA=strongly agree). By completing this questionnaire, you consent to having your results published. All participants who complete the questionnaire can enter a draw for a gift card. Responses will remain anonymous and a separate draw slip for your personal information will be used exclusively for the draw, then destroyed. Thank-you for your ideas and input.

1. At my child's elementary school I felt

He/she was safe and comfortable	SD	D	U	A	SA
The teachers helped him/her to learn to his/her best ability	SD	D	U	A	SA
He/she was cared for	SD	D	U	A	SA
Learning was important	SD	D	U	A	SA
There were difficult subjects	SD	D	U	A	SA
He/she was bullied or ignored	SD	D	U	A	SA
There was opportunity for fun activities	SD	D	U	A	SA
He/she was being prepared for high school	SD	D	U	A	SA
Connected to the students and staff	SD	D	U	A	SA
Proud of where my child was	SD	D	U	A	SA

2. My child's elementary school provided

Knowledge of technology use	SD	D	U	A	SA
Physical education training	SD	D	U	A	SA
Effective reading and writing lessons	SD	D	U	A	SA
The math skills he/she needed	SD	D	U	A	SA
The opportunity to learn about the world	SD	D	U	A	SA
First Nation's culture and history	SD	D	U	A	SA

3. Did your child attend Moricetown Elementary School? Yes No
4. Was his/her bus ride more than 30 minutes? Yes No
5. Did he/she have brothers or sisters at the school? Yes No

6. Did family members (parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle) visit the school or classroom?
Yes No
7. Was the school a good place to be? Yes No
8. Describe what you liked about having your child attend this school.
9. Describe what you did not like about having your child attend this school.
10. List any other ways the school could have better supported your child or helped your child be prepared to be successful in high school.

Appendix J

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS—parents/guardians

Time of interview:

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

[The goal of this interview is to support aboriginal learners. By developing a sense of the journey and lived experiences of First Nation families and students through the educational system, the impact should be able to be measured qualitatively. The purpose of study is to shed light on how aboriginal learners are supported in the educational system. There will be one interview for each participant. Interviews will be coded and themed in order to recognize familiar patterns and categories and move towards explaining and improving student success rates. This interview should last 30-40 minutes. Please read and sign consent form.]

RESEARCH QUESTION: To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the community in a public elementary school?

Start taping

Could you tell me where you were raised?

What kinds of activities did you enjoy as you were growing up?

How has growing up as a Wetsuwet'en person supported the development of your personality/belief system?

What level of education have you attained?

Can you describe how many children you have and their ages/grades?

Please describe your child's experience of elementary school. Were they happy with their education? Why?

Are you happy with how their education has transpired? Why?

How has the elementary school that they attended helped to shape their personality?

What are your thoughts about the direction of Aboriginal education?

Describe the advantages of attending the band operated school?...disadvantages?

What might be the advantages of commuting to the public school? disadvantages?

What are some of the reasons you might have heard from others about the choice to attend one school or the other?

How would you describe the benefits and drawbacks to having Native, Non-Native teaching staff for Aboriginal students?

What do you see as your role for ensuring your child has a positive education experience?

Is there anything you would like to add about the broad topic of Aboriginal education? Or, more specifically, the experience of your child/children in the public-school system or the band operated setting of independent schools?

Thank-you so much for this opportunity.

Appendix K

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS—students

Time of focus group discussion:

Date:

Interviewer:

Focus group members:

Position of focus group members:

[The goal of this interview is to support aboriginal learners. By developing a sense of the journey and lived experiences of First Nation families and students through the educational system, the impact should be able to be measured qualitatively. The purpose of study is to shed light on how aboriginal learners are supported in the educational system. Participants will be involved in one focus group discussion. The discussion will be coded and themed in order to recognize familiar patterns and categories and move towards explaining and improving student success rates. This focus group discussion should last 30-40 minutes. Please read and sign consent form.]

RESEARCH QUESTION: To what degree is high school achievement affected for on-reserve First Nation children who attend a community, band-operated school, and for those who choose to be educated outside the community in a public elementary school?

Start taping

Could you tell me about your age/grade and where you were raised?

What kinds of activities did you enjoy as you were growing up?

How has growing up as a Wetsuwet'en person in Moricetown supported the development of your personality/belief system?

Describe your feelings and experiences of elementary school? Did you like the school? Why?

Did you have different teachers every year?

Describe a teacher you found that you really connected with?

Describe a teacher who you found challenging.

What are your thoughts about the direction of Aboriginal education?

Describe the advantages of attending the band operated school?...disadvantages?

What might be the advantages of commuting to the public school? disadvantages?

What are some of the reasons you might have heard from others about the choice to attend one school or the other?

What are some of the benefits and drawbacks to having Native, Non-Native teaching staff for Aboriginal students?

Is there anything you would like to add about the broad topic of Aboriginal education? Or, more specifically, your experience in the public-school system or the band operated setting of independent schools?

Thank-you so much for this opportunity.